Red Cloth and Green Forest

ALFONSO VINCI

Translated from the Italian by
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The Silent Hunters

[Frontispiece - facing title page]

approaching, and barked in astonishment: the Indians made signs, urging us not to shoot them. The otter is an animal with a strong dose of magic in his veins, and to kill him would be asking for prolonged rain. 680

From the Mari we passed into its smallest tributary, the Usina, and thence into the insignificant Moné—a yellow, stagnant stream, perpetually overgrown, like a green tunnel. Great tree-trunks blocked our passage and the Indians clambered out armed with axes to deal with them. Sometimes a trunk would lie just a few inches under the surface, so that it was impossible to hack through it. With the motor at full throttle we would literally skip over such obstacles, taking care to hoist up the outboard just in time to avoid smashing it against the submerged trunk. Each time we rounded a curve the Indians waved their arms and announced the Moné landing ahead; but when, on the second evening of our journey up the Moné, the landing did come into view at last, no one noticed. It was only by pure chance that we didn't overshoot the spot.

Old ruined huts, mouldering and full of spiders, crickets, and beetles, littered the Moné beach. We had to build fresh ones. The others we burned as firewood. The next day we set out through the forest with the first boat. But for all the vast local knowledge of the Sape men, we went up the wrong stream! And after a long day of gruelling effort the canoe ended up in a dry little stream-bed where, so far as we could judge, we were at least two kilometres further up the Kupāpaipà.

Our plight was serious. A boat weighing a thousand pounds couldn't possibly be got down this sandy ditch. Far the better plan would be to turn back and retrace our steps, in spite of the difficulty, and lose two days. But for the moment we decided to do nothing, leaving the craft where she was, wedged between a tree-trunk and a mudbank.

The *Pirata*, without the misleading help of the Sape guides, made her way triumphantly straight to the right beach without any loss of time at all. 123*

While we were coming back from the Kupāpaipà to the hut on the Moné the Sape men heard something in the distance which alarmed them: other Indians were approaching from the direction of the Mari. We very soon met them. They were hauling a little canoe, the common small boat of Guiana [501] known as a *curiara*. It was a flimsy affair, which slipped along over the poles we had laid down for our own boat as if it was on water. Sitting in it was a girl [854] with a child like some horrible spider clinging to her back. The boy was a mere

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123 skeleton, darker in colour than the others, with big, wet eyes like a dog's. When the canoe came to a standstill in front of us and the woman got out, we could see the little monster in all his horror. These Indians were Shirians, and one of them, a plump fellow with a mild, softly smiling manner, proclaimed himself a Guayca—the most ferocious of the Shirians, savages of savages.

'But these are harmless,' said the Sape men. 'They won't do us any harm'—and they surveyed the strangers as if they were just well-trained dogs. Agustin had spent a lot of time with the Shirians from his youth up, and spoke their language well. We thought we might turn this chance meeting to good account by engaging these Indians as guides for the descent of the Caura, the Sape men having made it clear that this was outside their beat and that they couldn't come any further. After a rapid palaver and the exchange of some furtive glances, the Shirians refused. According to Agustin the men might have been ready to agree, but the child was afraid of us. He 'didn't want'. We gave them two boxes of matches and they made off, swift and silent, like ghosts.

Indeed, there was something ghost-like about this whole encounter here on the Moné. We had bumped into the dreaded Shirians, inhabitants of the far-off cordillera—and were they not the ape-men themselves, the howling Guaharibos, the monsters everyone spoke of with terror, though no one knew them? One of them was thin, one was plump, one was darker-skinned and one lighter than average; and with them a child so hideously reduced by disease that when the girl took him off her back it looked horribly like pulling off a little polyp. Yet in point of actual fact these were just Indians like any others, the Sape or the Arekuna. It was just our romanticism which had situated them beyond the bounds of the possible world—not only in space, but in time, as if here were some prehistoric race as ancient as the origin of our dreams.

The meeting with the Shirians seemed to have had some effect upon our Sapes, for that evening, when we were baling up our goods and chattels into bundles ready for carrying across the portage—which would take us quite two days—Antonio informed us that the men would quit unless we increased the rates of pay. It wasn't the first time we had received such an ultimatum, and we had resolved that henceforth we would take no notice. To increase the rate of pay would mean denuding ourselves of supplies of goods which would be very precious when we came to the Upper Caura and the Branco river. Even a small knife, in those parts, would have a very definite value.

900 'Doctor,' said Antonio, on the morning which should have seen everybody

screaming loudly and the *Pirata* making no headway at all. She only reared and 0-0-0 plunged, and we began to ship water. We should have to go back—a highly delicate operation. Huge rocks prevented us from getting to a quieter reach on our left. Manuera had turned pale and was working away furiously with his paddle to get the craft in nearer the bank. In the end we found a patch of slack water and were able to jump in and drag the boat on to a gravel bank. She was full of water by now and we did some hasty baling with a bucket. Even Manuera had seen the light: he knew now that the Caura and its rapids are stronger than any man-made motors, and that the world of the great forest is still stronger than the world of work.

Alas, the rapids very soon had their full revenge, just as we were hauling the two boats into another arm of the river where the water tumbled more steeply down, but with less force. The *Pirata* was already through and in safety higher up. The *Rumbera* too was successfully over the first bad patch, and Giovanni was running along the rocks to take the cable to Momi, who was further on. Artur was still on board, probably because he wanted a ride and didn't feel like taking a bath. While Giovanni was jumping from one rock to another the rope slipped out of his grasp, and being greasy slid away over the rocks. The current swung the boat round and she began to go downstream sideways, with a sort of violent skipping motion. She struck on a rocky shelf and shipped some water. The motor, its arm now raised, hit against a boulder and broke off at the clamp, plunging straight into the river. Artur hadn't moved: but he was looking round wildly. After a few more hair-raising turns the boat finished up rocking in a patch of dead water, and that was the end of the adventure. The motor was at the bottom of the deepest pocket on the Caura, and its future would be limited to the process of gradual chemical dissolution. We continued on our way with the *Rumbera* in tow. But our greatest loss was not the outboard engine. It was the good humour and the carefree spirits of Manuera himself.

XI

In the neighbourhood of the Canaracuni the great mountains had already 123*
begun again: ahead of us the Uana-Coco and to the left, the Arauta range pre- 133
sented their high grey sandstone walls, patterned with the white stripes of the cascades. Neither the Makiritari nor the Shirians fear the Magnaritòn, and no

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* 123 one gave a thought to these peaks that towered higher with every bend of the
133 river. Then one afternoon, after a storm, they dropped out of sight, and we
realized that we had entered a different region. Manuera pointed leftwards, to
the mouth of a small river whose water was yellow.

'Pulipuli. Nuna,' he told us—Nuna being the Shirian and Makiritari pro-
* nunciation of 'Luna'. 'There is my home, the home of the Shirians.'

123 We swung into the mouth of the Luna and tied up under a tall clay bank among a few ill-made canoes—if you could call them canoes, for they looked more like rotten tree-trunks swept on to the little landing-beach in the course of some sudden flood.

Our arrival in the dirty waters of the Luna was a signal for swift and secret flight on the part of the population. Some Shirian youngsters had been hunting a capybara which the throb of our motor scared off. The boys, no less scared than the animal, ran to hide in the nearby huts, spreading the wondrous news that men had come with beards and an engine.

101 The Moon Valley people occupy a fair-sized wedge of territory in the
[131] forests between the Lower Canaracuni and the Caura. Their little huts are
[342] sorry imitations of the big Makiritari erections, and they have burned out big
[177] patches of forest for the sowing of manioc and bananas. All this is the work of
the last twenty years. Not till then did the tribes of the Shirian borderland grow
[244] weary of their nomad life, their wars and their plundering expeditions, and
[245] decide to set up house and home. Pulipuli became a sort of agricultural centre
361 for the groups living on the Upper Caura, or on the Merehuari and its tributary
178 streams as far as the great mountain saddle between Uana-Coco, Canaua, and
[101] Uagna. These people here were therefore the most advanced of the Shirians,
not only in a geographical sense but also in their culture. Their numbers were
[167] continually increasing because they had a magnetic attraction for neighbouring
tribes who were still mere primitive forest hunters.

563 Manuera had married a Pulipuli girl and then joined her tribe. 'Let us build
177 a fine house,' he had told her, 'and I'll come and live with you. I'll bring good
361 manioc and banana roots. We'll plant a big patch, in the proper way we
Makiritaris know, and there'll be no lack of food. You Shirians are for ever
as hungry as beasts and I can't stomach the worms you eat.'

There was great puzzlement among the old Shirians—those whose hairless heads showed the marks of so many battles and so many robbing and plundering expeditions all through the valley and the Merehuari cordillera as far as the

Branco river in Brazil. They considered an agricultural life a peasant's life, and 563
a dull one at that, with no possible appeal to the imagination. There were a few 177
palavers about it, but it is well-known that among primitive peoples the old 361
are listened to least: wisdom favours the youths and the boys, who have their whole lives in front of them—not behind them like a stream flowing away. The young men prevailed, and burned the forest. The first big hut was built according to Manuera's ideas, and served as a pattern for all the Shirians when they came to build.

So we too arrived at this 'big hut', which Manuera showed us with a pride 123*
that was scarcely justified, and here too the Shirians fled away into the woods, much to the amusement of our guides. We could hear them there, uttering their guttural cries of terror and wonderment.

Inside the hut there was no one, with the exception of two old folk stretched out in their liana hammocks. They didn't stir: it was as if they didn't even see
us. One of them was a woman whose body was reddened nearly all over with [164]
cárate—a skin disease frequent among the Indians. A macaw, scared by the sight [231]
of our beards, set up a howl on his perch and started biting through the cord which attached him to it. Manuera went off into the woods, calling the others, and the thick green swallowed him up for a good hour. We were rather afraid he would want to stop here for the night, for our stomachs were turning at the filth around us, but we had misjudged our man: Manuera was now engaged in more important business and had no desire for more than a brief, benevolent survey of his kinsfolk. We very soon got back to the boat and at last were able to take deep breaths of the fresh river and forest air.

Manuera told us that the Shirians had not been really so scared by our arrival. Indeed, they had been expecting us. But they couldn't quite pluck up the courage to look close. Our stature, our beards, our clothes and our guns, in the eyes of primitive people, turned us into supermen—dread figures, terrifying as monsters and above all, essentially evil.

The news that we were on the way had been bruited abroad by the party [203]
we had met at the Moné pass—and *à propos* of this, we learned from Manuera that the spider-child had died soon afterwards, somewhere on the Sabaru. It was a relief to hear this, even if the poor little monstrosity's death had been caused by the sight of us, as the Shirians thought. Manuera's gestures became wild, and his speech difficult to follow, as he tried to explain their attitude.

RED CLOTH AND GREEN FOREST

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A little above Pulipuli we came to a large stream of clear, coffee-coloured water: the Canaracuni.

We slept in a sound Makiritari hut near the confluence of the two rivers that night, and the next day found us at the foot of some powerful rapids. To get up through these was a tricky business, calling for a highly specialized technique beyond our experience. We had had some eventful hours even before we reached this point, and a hilarious progress, for at every bend in the river we had encountered whole boatfuls of Indians, both Shirians and Makiritari, who mobbed us and wanted to clamber on board. The delights of an outboard engine were more than they could resist! And so it happened that at one time we counted twenty-eight of them, squatting and lying about all over our baggage. It was a heady thought that all this crowd was proceeding up the swift brown waters of the Canaracuni by virtue of one motor!

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When we got to the Kumpakà rapids, as they were apparently called, Manuera tried to make us understand, by the aid of his sweeping gestures, the manœuvres which were called for. We couldn't follow, but next morning the difficulty resolved itself. There came into view, in startling silence, a big canoe of fine workmanship paddled by a number of athletic-looking Makiritari who had the air of being very sure of themselves. Amidships there sat an old fellow who in addition to his loincloth was wearing a dirty shirt, and with him another old man of more modest bearing, one or two women, and some children and dogs, all mixed up together in a silent huddle. The steersman was a thin and very ugly customer with only one eye, dressed in trousers and shirt. Our camp was struck dumb at the sight. It was like watching some religious ceremony. The modest-looking old man—in point of fact it was Benito, the owner of the Ceiba property—addressed Momi in passable Spanish, asking him if he was the chief. Momi gestured towards me, and the old fellow turned to me at once, saying:

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'Here, Chief Pancho—Makiritari Chief.'

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Only later did we discover that Pancho was the one with the squint, not the old man in the shirt: the latter had been chief in his time, but had now handed the sceptre to his son.

Pancho spoke no Spanish, but somehow or other he had picked up exactly seven words of second-hand Portuguese: they dated from a trip to Boa Vista some few years back. Pancho could say: *tarawaio*, *bom*, *dia*, *filio*, *magnà*, *agua*, and *matto*. That is, work, good, day, son, tomorrow, water, and forest. And he

Makiritare SS20

certainly knew how to command the Indians; all of them, Shirians and Makiri- M 622
tari, held him in respect and did his bidding without question. He would lie in 123
his hammock, with the watchful dogs lying underneath, in a kind of thoughtful Y 123*
somnolence. Then all at once he would sit up and call all the men, in a voice M
with a strident edge to it, and set them to work. He altered his tone of voice [186]
according to whether he was dealing with his own people or with the Shirians.
For the latter he reserved a range of almost animal cries. You would have
thought he was trying to rouse a herd of pigs.

We put our trust in him and his renown, and three days later, hardly believ- Y [133]
ing our eyes, we came out on to the Kirisochi savannah to see in front of us the
dramatic rocky walls of the rosy Sarisariñama mountains. It was December 25th.
Our trip from La Paragua to the Upper Canaracuni had lasted pretty well two
months.

2

The Earthly Paradise

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342 THERE are various ways of living in the forest, and as many ways of building one's dwelling there. There are men who are wary of the forest and to defend themselves build a big hut which is virtually a forest in itself: the doors will shut tight, the roofs hold out against the storms of years. While others, with no such precise ideas, will be content with a roof of palm leaves held up by four posts. Others again, with an instinctive feeling for the open air, will just take two forked branches and prop them up against a tree, so as to be able to sling up hammocks of bark or liana, perhaps adding a few leaves of the wild banana, should they feel it necessary, for a roof.

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[171] The big hut is a real masterpiece of native architecture, and an imposing sight, while the frail shelter is rather touching. The Makiritari, like the Pemontòn and the Makushi from the Rio Branco, are adept at building the large-scale clan-dwelling—the 'big hut'—which is circular with a pointed roof. They level off the site, stamp it down, and plant the central stake or pole—the heart of the whole building and its symbol. The other poles are ranged round it at precise intervals determined and checked by the chief himself. The outer wall, whose framework consists of more slender poles, is eventually plastered with coloured clay. Once this has dried it cracks, so that it comes to resemble certain ancient dry wall constructions.

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[484] The masterpiece of the whole edifice is the roof. The highly skilful interweaving of thick and thin poles, with their liana latticework reinforcement, allows for a window opening upwards like a postern gate. The outer covering is done with San Paulo palm—a dwarf tree which grows in swampy land. But the high peak of the roof is finished off with the feathery leaves of the *manaca*—a rarer palm. When the roof has reached the stage at which it is ready to be closed in, a great deal of *manaca* is needed. Everyone sets off by boat along the river,

Pemon SS16
Makiritare SS20

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perhaps for a trip of several days, to look for it. These excursions have a festive 342
air: the Indians hunt, fish and swim, and shoot the rapids with gleeful yells—to [824]
come home with their canoes loaded high with these soft palm fronds. Within [484]
a radius of several kilometres, all the trees will have been stripped.

Smaller communities of Makiritari, without the means or the enthusiasm [527]
to build the 'big hut', will content themselves with a rectangular structure. M
This has a single-span roof sloping down from the back to the front, with 342
rough walls of stakes driven into the ground and bound with lianas. The roof 184
will still consist of San Paulo leaves, but these are less intricately woven than in the case of the 'big hut', being made on the ground like a hurdle and then hoisted into place and firmly secured.

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The Pemontòn, on the other hand, have adopted an entirely different 342
pattern of hut, for temporary purposes or for housing a small number only. Taller and less graceful than the Makiritari type, it is roofed most ingeniously P
with alternating layers of poles of gradually decreasing lengths set upon each
other so as to form a pyramid. This is finished off with whole fronds of *sehe* [824]
or *maripa* palm—fair sized trees found in profusion near all the rivers of the Amazon-Guiana region.

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The Shirians—the real Shirians, that is to say the Samatari and the Guayca— 342
build nothing at all. Those of them who do adapt themselves to the humiliating [177]
labour of house-building are just keeping up with their neighbours, the Makiritari. The forest bristles with so many trees, big and little, and all so straight that they might have been placed there on purpose; going up and down them is a grand game and one that always provides something to eat: a grub, a wasps' nest with honey in it, fruit.... So why shut oneself off from it all, away from this forest that provides food? One should clearly do the opposite. Why build huts from dead trees, when one can use the live ones? All it needs is two crossed Y-shaped boughs propped against a trunk so as to make a triangle, and there is a place to sling one's hammock!

Sometimes, in the forest, the traveller comes across an abandoned Shirian camp: just some heaps of ashes and a goodly number of these triangular 'bedsteads'—a true forest within a forest. The rotting hammocks are still hanging where they were put.

We couldn't quite accept any of these indigenous architectural patterns for 000
our own purposes, however, since we felt ourselves to be the heirs of a nobler tradition. We had to find our own answer to the problem. We opted for a big

0100 themselves off from their kinsfolk. They had settled at a point much used for a crossing-place and therefore convenient for trading. On the Upper Caura there remained only Benito's place at the Ceiba and Pancho's in the Canaracuni district. On the Merevari—the name given by the Indians to the higher reaches of the Caura—the Makiritari were comparatively numerous: they reached as far as Yemecumi and the Brazilian frontier. Not that Pancho used the word 'frontier', which is unknown to the Indians; he simply referred to 'the rivers which run through the other parts, to the south'. In these 'other parts' only one single Makiritari tribe remained. Its chief was called Frenario, and from Pancho's description, eked out with little touches from Benito, Frenario emerged a figure quite as extraordinary as his name, to say the least of it. On the Upper Ventuari, which follows a westward course towards the Orinoco, there were a few settlements, inhabited by close kinsfolk of the Erebato, whose chief, Carlos, according to this midnight saga, was another redoubtable warrior. Finally, there were other Makiritari on the Upper and Lower Cunucunuma and the Padamo—tributary streams of the Orinoco in its first reaches, girdling the Marahuaca uplands where cane, suitable for making blowpipes, was to be found.

Pancho knew the exact strength of every one of these settlements—in terms of able-bodied men, women and children. Raising his hands, he would stick up a thumb for 'man'. Then it would be 'women'—just as if he were referring to manioc or hunting dogs. The fingers would come into action for the younger generation, as he ticked them off saying: 'Boy, boy, boy,' as if each face verily passed before his mind's eye in the process. Pancho's discourse continued far into the night, dying down at last with the flames of the fires we had lit to keep out the damp.

III

*123 At last we were alone, we could collect our thoughts and enjoy a little purer air. The Shirians and the Makiritari had gone running off to display to their kith and kin the goods that they had received as wages: their vanity, on such occasions, exceeds that of civilized people.

Our solitude lasted twenty-four hours. Then through the long grass of the savannah there came a huge, motley crew of Indians unknown to us—very tiny

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men, painted a terrifying red. Momi took up his position behind the palisade of our hut, found a gap and thrust the barrel of the gun through it. We were at a loss to know what to do with the other gun. It scared us more than it ever scared the savages. 123*

I'd always been sceptical of tales about the ferocity of primitive peoples. This was the moment to display my scepticism. We therefore let things take their course, as if the arrival at our hut of a horde of naked dwarfs, all painted red and armed with long bows and arrows, was the most natural event in the world, the sort of thing we'd been used to from childhood days in our own homeland. The Indians adopted just this tactic towards us! The moment came when we were surrounded by a mass of revelling, skipping little monsters, like goats at pasture. The womenfolk hung behind, hesitating to show themselves: many of them had children at the breast, and they feared the very sight of our beards would terrify them, and even cause their death through the 'evil eye'. Gathering them protectively to their bosoms, they laughed rather nervously and echoed the tongue-clicking that punctuated the chatter and the bewildering howls of the male Shirians. For these *were* the Shirians—the real thing, unlike Pancho's hewers of wood who lived now as mere vassals and had adopted the customs of the Soto.

One old fellow stood out among the rest. His hair was ruffled; he wore a perpetual smile and dangling testicles. '*Auai*,' he declared, '*auai, auai*,' ending up with a clicking of his tongue and grunting deeply and explosively from his chest. We didn't then know that '*auai*' meant simply 'yes' in Shirian; we therefore called the old man Auai. Later we came to know him for the chief of the Uana-Dildep tribe, whose camp lay one day's march east of Kirisochi. Auai was intelligent and quick-witted, but his people were plunderers, infinitely resourceful. While the chief was smiling at the magazine photographs of actresses we had brought with us—he didn't understand what they were, but they drew his interest—his men and women, with methodical efficiency, were attempting to slip their pilfering hands through the cracks between the stakes that formed our back wall and make off with what they could. If the gap was too narrow for the grown-ups' hands, they maliciously urged on the children to try theirs. This innocent little game was one which it would have been interesting to observe from start to finish; unfortunately there was our dignity to be considered, as well as the old chief's integrity of character to be reckoned with. Laughing, he joined in as we chased off the women and children, and 123* 609 (181)

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speeded them with threats of dubious efficacy as they retreated to a safe distance.

'*Auai*,' said the old man. We took him up in chorus and by evening the merriment reached its height, punctuated by the howls of the Shirians as they sampled our food supplies, grimacing over them like apes. The howling and shouting gradually gave place to something a little more musical; soon they were singing, and this in its turn excited them to dancing and stylized movements that were of great interest to us. Auai repeated anything we said, without hesitation. Sometimes the imitation was perfect, but for the most part our barbarous language tied his tongue up, so that he would be saying '*genestre*' for '*stregone*' (wizard) and '*chiribichappa*' for '*aeroplano*', amid general hilarity.

By the time the Great Bear had appeared in the cold sky over the Sarisariñama, a certain madness had invaded us too, and in an innocent, untropical sort of way we ran mildly amok. We got hold of the gun and fired shots into the air. This made the Indians jump for joy. Some of them started dancing and howling in a fine frenzy round and round the hut, sweating like pigs and led by Monni armed with a big aluminium saucepan on which he kept up a rhythmic beat with a machete. The song and dance finished when the performers had no strength left, and no voice. The most dogged of them, however, even after they had flung themselves down on the benches, or on the ground, or lay stretched out on the table, still managed a last raucous imitation of the refrain they had learned from us: '*Paracatepparache, che, che, che.*'

When morning came the men of Auai went off promising to return with bananas and sugar-cane: we undertook to purchase these, giving them in exchange those things which the women had vainly tried to lift from us. Then the long file of dirty dwarfs vanished among the trees, and with them our windsock which they had taken off its pole at some stage of the proceedings and were now carrying off as a trophy.

[115] We learned more that same day about the 'windsock' from Luis Antonio, a Shirian speaking perfect Spanish who had come up the river with two other Indians: they didn't exactly inspire confidence, though he presented them as brothers.

'I saw one of the Olatiri Shirians wearing it,' he told us, giving the Auai men their proper name. 'He was running about in the woods with one leg on and one off.'

IV

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Had Luis Antonio been wearing clothes, we should have pronounced him 159
very well turned out, for he looked dark and perfectly groomed in his nudity, Y
which was enhanced in very smart fashion by a loincloth of fiery red and a [291]
ruffle of white feathers on his right arm. In addition to his name and his know- Y
ledge of Spanish there was one other thing about him that suggested that his [191]
story might not be quite the usual one: his rotten teeth. All the Indian peoples Y
have teeth that are very strong and brilliantly white. They are used to hard [164]
exertions on the meat the savage eats, while his fruits provide the necessary [145]
minerals, and keep their strength and colour well into old age. Luis Antonio
was an exception—his teeth were no longer good: there was a long history to
them, and we soon got to know it.

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Uarema—Uarma, Ualema, Uadma, or Uadema were alternative forms, all 628
very close in the Shirian pronunciation—had been a Guayca boy from the 159
Uagna tribe. They were real warriors, forever at war with the Samatari on the
other side of the cordillera. Battles were a regular feature of tribal life. When
the arsenal of long-range weapons had been exhausted the armies would come
to grips with clubs and sticks. During one such engagement the young Uarema
disappeared into the forest and, finding himself lost, stayed all alone on the
bank of the Merevari, living on fruit and worms. At the time he was probably
no more than four or five years old, but the Guayca Indians are savages among
the savages, and four or five is old enough for a boy to know what is good to
eat in the forest and what isn't; where to find it; and how to catch it. While he
was all by himself on a beach, getting a few little fish by striking at them with
a stick, a Makiritari party came along, found him there, and took him with M
them. They were going down the Caura to sell canoes to the people on the [439]
rubber plantations at Maripa (which is almost on the Orinoco). The child,
travelling with them, soon accustomed himself to their language and their
Casava bread.

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At Maripa, one Martin Visdo, a rubber man who knew Guiana like the 159
palm of his hand, saw the boy and prodded him as you would prod a spring 177
chicken or a sucking-pig in a shop.

'A fine boy this,' he declared. 'But wicked. Wicked and obstinate, like all

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his tribe. You can see it in his eyes. . . .' Uarema kept them down all the time . . . 'but I want to keep him here. He'll be the first Shirian to go to school, and if he doesn't go, he'll be the first to get his bottom kicked by a civilized boot.'

Uarema stayed behind, while the Makiritari went back with an extra few yards of the good old red cloth.

Martin Viudo was a collector—of human beings. Around him, like one big family, lived Indians of every race: Taurepàn from the Gran Sabana, Arekuna from the Caroni, Makiritari from the Caura, Piaroa from the Orinoco, Cuiba from the Guaviare lands and finally one Bare from Rio Negro. The only one he hadn't got was a Shirian—the prize monster of the whole Indian scene. And now he'd found him too!

He began by calling him Luis Antonio, after a friend of his who had died of fever on the Atabapo. He clothed him and entrusted him to Donna Josefa, the village schoolma'm. At school the boys called him a cannibal, and he hit out at them whenever he could, as 'his wicked instincts' prompted him. At any rate, that was Donna Josefa's opinion: she couldn't stand the little savage. Very soon, he started to play truant from that narrow world bounded by the alphabet and the primer with its abstruse explanations of the catechism—A for Adam, B for Bible, C for Christ and so on. It was all beyond his understanding, and one day he hit the schoolmistress and went back to his home, where the wife of Martin Viudo promptly hit him. Having cried off school, Luis Antonio went to work for his adopted father. He was growing fast now, and strong enough to paddle and steer boat-loads of balata and zarape through the Caura estuary. He soon learned to handle a motor too; on Sundays he would go off to Maripa and get drunk, begging tots of white rum off the peons who were merry enough to regale him freely. 'Drink up, Man-Eater, and then go back to your cannibals and spit in their faces!' they would shout. Then with a laugh they would pour him whole glasses of brandy. By the time he was twenty his teeth were rotting away with alcohol and iced drinks—and he couldn't stand civilization any longer.

159 No one knows why or how, least of all himself—but something called him back to the forest under the rocky cordillera which had nurtured the young child. He saw his chance when a boat-load of Makiritari put in at Maripa, and returned with them to the Merevari, where he had no difficulty in getting in touch with his own people—for in intervals between battles they explored the Merevari, the Curutu and all the streams rising on the Uana-Coco watershed.

'I am Uarema,' he declared to his Guayca kinsmen, who looked on him with 159
hostile eyes because he was wearing trousers, 'Uarema, son of Messi. I was
here as a boy. A long time I have been with "the rationals" [the civilized men]
and I have grown to manhood. You are my people.'

His turning up in this fashion had a touch of the fabulous about it, and his
kinsmen took him along without ill-treating him. When they found him to be [622]
a man of many accomplishments, and the old men remembered how he had disappeared
during Uagna's time, after an encounter with the Samatari from the
Aracosa lands, they kept him with them as their rightful chief, giving him unlimited
freedom of action. As his obedient subjects they left it all to him.

Uarema had never taken to civilization. For him, it had lacked something. 159
What it had lacked, we cannot guess: the civilization of the Lower Guiana 177
rivers may be bounded by the cloth hammock and the bottle of rum, the loose
woman and the pack of cards, but it cannot be ranked any lower than the
barbarianism of the Guayca, eaters of worms and snakes. But now, after his 159
experience of life with 'the rationals', neither could the young man endure the 177
ceaseless warfare which engaged his own peoples. The broken heads he saw 185
round the fire in the evenings, the bowls of the medicine-men at their exorcizings 241
—all this was anathema to him. He told his kinsfolk they had better put it
all aside, and grow something. From the Soto they could obtain seeds and roots.
Much manioc was needed, because without it one was always hungry. Sugarcane
was a pleasant thing to suck at any time, and the children loved it. Above
all, there must be bananas, as far as eye could see—the forest must be transformed
into a huge garden of fruits, there for the picking. Thus, with his head
full of ideas which owed their origin to the years he had spent in civilization,
Luis Antonio founded a new Guayca people. They were Guayca Indians no
longer, but peasants—peasants who cared for the tilling of the soil and a sure
supply of food. These Guayca called themselves after him, Uarema. They inhabited [101]
two big homesteads an hour distant from the Merevari river—a little [361]
above the mouth of the Canaracuni.

Now Luis Antonio wanted to stay with us and work, because he needed 159
cloth for his people. We gave him what little we had been able to save from the
greedy hands of Pancho's men, and he went off for a brief visit to his tribe,
intending to return to Kirisochi in four days' time.

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema
Makiritare SS20

v

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123 Once more we were left on our own, waiting for the plane and making plans for a documentary film we wanted to take back. In the meanwhile a Makiritari showed up. He was a middle-aged man, muscular like a statue, and his skin was the colour of copper. Our visitor had a doleful little voice which contrasted oddly with his athletic appearance. It hovered somewhere behind a perpetual smile, like the crowing of a cock screened off by a flowering hedge. Pedro was the name. He had made his way through the Ventuari and the lower Caura, with *molto tarauako*—much work, much exertion. . . . M (186)

M [752] [177] Pedro would have come to see us before, but he had been put off by the presence of the Shirians. 'Shirians—bad men,' he told us. 'Me, Pedro, good, not bad man.' His wife had a mastoid, and he had operated on her with a splinter of glass that had originally been part of a medicine bottle from Las Trinqueras—everything civilised came from Las Trinqueras, the hub of the world. And the woman, a dried-up thirty-year-old, had in fact a deep cut behind her ear which was suppurating. A few injections of penicillin soon put that right, and such was the patient's gratitude that whenever she saw us coming or going she would give us the same meek, piteous look as a lamb about to be slaughtered, and then turn to the others saying: 'What good men, what good men. . .!'

Pedro was a very able fisherman, and when we had supplied him with hooks he went off to the Upper Canaracuni with a child whom we took to be his daughter. But when he came back, he was ashamed of his catch. He thought it wouldn't find favour in our eyes.

'Soto eat them,' he declared, 'Shirians eat them too, but you eat other fish.'

We never could make out whether this was really diffidence on Pedro's part, or whether it was astuteness: so far were we from fully understanding the mentality of primitive men.

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*123 [439] We were to hear more about fish and fishing when Auai came back with his horde of ruffians, bringing us the promised bananas and sugar-cane and receiving in exchange the few goods we still possessed. Auai went fishing in the
Y [226] Canaracuni headwaters with barbasco, a vegetable poison frequently used for this purpose. Artur and I decided to go along with him, leaving the others to wait at Kirisochi.

Barbasco is a kind of liana which can grow to impressive dimensions— 278
attaining a stem up to eight inches thick. The Indians cut it in the forest and 226
collect a large pile together at a convenient place for pressing. Their press is 824
made from one of those dead trunks of hardwood which are found in such
quantity in the forest and some wooden clubs specially cut for the purpose. (412)
The liana stems are pounded and then done up into bundles so that they can be
easily taken to the place to be fished, which may be some way off. Here they
are immersed several times in the river, releasing a milky juice which gives the
water a whitish opalescence. The juice of the liana reduces the air content of
the water through oxidization, and the fish very soon come floating up to the
surface—asphyxiated but not poisoned.

This procedure is a very common one among the Indians, whose fishing 226
follows a two-year cycle—this being the minimum time needed for each [825]
stretch of water to become repopulated after the use of barbasco. It goes
without saying that this extra[illegible]f liana loses its efficacy in anything bigger than
a small stream. Nevertheless, in times of scarcity the Indians will attempt to
fish medium-sized rivers in this way, banding together to collect huge quanti-
ties of liana. The fish taken are then smoked and wrapped in banana leaves, [251]
after which they will keep for months.

Auai and his men had to go far afield with their barbasco before they found 123*
a suitable place. The probability was that the Shirians had already been at work, (226)
unknown to anyone, near the source of the Canaracuni. We therefore left him
to it after all, and returned to camp early one morning, just in time to meet the
plane that was circling the field.

VI

On Sunday, the 24th June, a big plane came into sight over the rim of the Sarisariñama mountains—towards the east where they merge into the Socsoc range. It swooped down to about three hundred feet and then went off without giving any signal. The excitement among the Indians on the spot—Luis Antonio was one of them and he explained the nature of the machine to his kinsfolk—was doomed to disappointment. And time and again this story of the aeroplane continued to arouse our hopes, only to dampen them once more.

A week later it appeared, at the same time—so suddenly and unexpectedly

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123 that it might have shot up into the air out of the towering rocks of the sierra. This time it almost skimmed the treetops, but once again it did not land. A plane of such size—it had two motors—would never have been able to touch down on the Kirisochi strip, and certainly would not have been able to take off from it again. It flew over the camp a second time and dropped a bottle containing a laconic message to the effect that a landing was out of the question, but that the following week a single-engined plane would pay us a visit instead. For the present, the note added, the pilot would make one more flight over the camp. If we were in dire need of anything, we were to raise both hands. If not, only one.

The main point of the plane's coming was really only to bring us supplies —and at the moment we were suffering no particular shortage—and to provide transport back for Jean, our American girl, and eventually for Artur, the German. When it made the third run in, we raised one hand only, and the pilot dropped us a bag of comforts, our mail, and a sack containing twenty pounds of potatoes. No doubt this was meant as compensation for his inability to land. It certainly helped to break the monotony of our diet.

* 123
126 All this time, Enrico and I were getting on with the scenario of our film. We took a few background scenes and shots of Indians, who were now coming and going daily. Our film was to be a documentary, about an expedition similar to our own which encountered the Makiritari and the Shirians: it then proceeded, following some darkly mysterious hints dropped by these tribes, to the Valley of Death—or the Valley of Cold, or maybe the Valley of the Devil —in which there was a stream full of diamonds. These duly gathered in we brought our expedition back via the Merevari rapids through all the glories of a Technicolor sunset. Of course there was hunting, fishing, canoeing and nature in the raw. This should have lent a certain interest quite independently of the diamonds, but the diamonds were a cinema 'must', and so we got to work on the bottle dropped by the plane. We ground it up between two stones, and there was our fabulous heap of precious, gleaming stones. But we weren't altogether satisfied with the results of this grinding process, and began to wonder whether our 'diamonds' would pass muster. The Canaracuni must have shared our doubts, for a month later we had an accident with the boat and the canisters of film we had shot went to the bottom, where they were washed clean.

020 Pedro had settled for quarters near us, but not inside the hut itself, which

Pedro had settled for quarters near us, but not inside the hut itself, which

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was periodically invaded by Shirians: he erected a little roof among the trees between us and the river, where there were less insects than elsewhere. He would come over in the evening and chat to us, sitting on the table, by the light of the hurricane lamp which Giovanni managed to get going after a struggle. Pedro came in useful. It was thanks to him that we were able to set up a price list, or a list of exchange values, putting a definite value on any work the Indians cared to do for us and the little fruit and greenstuff they could provide. The list showed, for instance, that a whole hand of bananas was worth one small looking-glass, and that five looking-glasses would buy one tapir. One pine-apple was exchangeable for one box of matches; four sewing needles for one sugar-cane; and one little tin of salt was the reward of a day's labour—that is, a day spent with us, stretched out in a hammock and singing, with requests for a share of our food every time one of us got busy near the fire. In most cases our price was a theoretical one, our actual supplies of goods being exhausted until the plane dropped us more. Nevertheless, we took care to make our price list known to all with the most eloquent explanations.

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In spite of this, some funny things happened. The rate for an antelope was five bolivars—a rather theoretical sum, equivalent in practice, for example, to one lima. We were also interested in the skin of any animal, part of our purpose being to collect them. For a whole antelope skin, we paid one bolivar or its equivalent in a reel of cotton, or a spoonful of lead shot, or two small hooks, etc. As a consequence, we would have an Indian come to give us a day's work, at the regular rate. During the day, paid by us, he would shoot, with our gun, an antelope which he expected us to pay for while he kept the skin. The skin was sold to us separately, while the meat would provide meals which he or his friends and relations shared with us.

On the Kirisochi savannah there thus arose some very complicated auditing problems. We decided to burn our price list and put our trust in our powers of improvisation.

VII

Y
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When Luis Antonio came back, we set out with him to climb the Sari-sariñama, the deity that watched over the source of the Canaracuni. Enrico, Giovanni, and I were in the party. Luis brought a kinsman, and there was also

*
123 Sempronio—this was the name we had given to an Auai boy who had elected to stay with us.

*
123 We made our way up the river of the same name which plunges down from
776 the highlands, with wonderful falls, into a ravine thick with vegetation. The
773 Shirians were strongly disinclined to go anywhere near the falls. It took us three days to overcome their objections and they only decided to go along with us when we told them we should otherwise set off by ourselves. Luis Antonio explained that the deep pool formed by the waterfall was the home of an enormous watersnake, *Lalakilpara*—a monster which lay coiled in readiness to devour anyone or anything it saw looking over the edge of the pool.

We laughed, but as far as the Indians were concerned our laughter fell on deaf ears. Luis Antonio was no exception, and he warned us not to jest about certain things. Numerous trails made by tapir and peccary were pointed out to us as paths the serpent had taken. One curious thing about the monster which remained unexplained was that he came regularly along the river-bank to the Kirisochi savannah for his excretions. But at last the Indians overcame their reluctance enough to make an inspection of the pool. Dumbfounded, they had to admit that Lalakilpara didn't exist, except as a highly coloured fiction among their older kinsfolk, who could recount the monster's whole history. It seemed to us that the power of fancy had transformed a few cross-currents driven furiously against the walls of the gorge by the whirlpool set up by the tumbling water, into this gigantic serpent whose breath—the air-disturbance—could suck down any man or beast who went too near the edge of the precipice. As to the distance the monster covered for purposes of nature, the symbolism here was even clearer: what it sought to explain was the way in which the river's alluvial matter found its way to the Kirisochi plain. The water was calmer by the time it reached this point, and the detritus carried along with it tended to be deposited here. This fable of the serpent was an example of a natural phenomenon stated in terms of myth—the only such example we found among the Shirians. After we had exploded the legend, Lalakilpara slowly died away in the Indain mind, his place being taken by the aeroplane and the outboard motor—monsters no less fantastic, and no less dread.

*
123 The slopes of the Sarisariñama range were very poor in wild life, as is often
[136] the case with these mountains, and Luis Antonio, to whom we had given a gun after he had proved himself to be a better shot than we were, was only able to get a Capuchin monkey or two. We boiled them—the result being a murky

broth with a strong tang. Little Sempronio was the cook—Sempronio with the small eyes and fierce, sharp teeth, ever ready to crunch anything edible there was to be found. We didn't worry too much about hygiene, because out in the blue it is hardly practical. Nor did we dwell on the question of Indian tastes in meat: they prefer the intestines and all the peculiar parts, to the flesh. Enrico and I, up on the Gran Sabana, had once lived for months at a time on monkeys and even worse things, and we weren't squeamish. But while Artur was fastidiously eating his helping of monkey-meat, his face contorted with disgust and he opened his mouth to let fall a little black thing, half chewed. This proved upon examination to be a real Shirian titbit, but Artur said a good many things with exclamation marks, ending up with: 'I'd never have believed that things would come to this.' 123*

'Nor would the monkey,' I replied philosophically, while Sempronio retrieved the mouthful and it disappeared with a strong sucking noise, as if he was taking a drink.

When we had finished our meal of monkey, Luis Antonio and his brothers [533] sang some Shirian airs, with a grace and phrasing that surprised us. We soon joined in with our own renderings: a deep chorus echoed through the mountain gorges. Then, for something to do, we chopped down some trees which fell with a huge crashing tumult. Luis Antonio took his axe and heroically tackled a giant *guarande*, and four hours later a vast mass of wood toppled down, bringing with it in its thunderous fall other trees fifty or sixty yards away. But The 24 ants, rudely disturbed, poured ferociously out of their nests, making us flee to our hammocks, where we lay waiting for the night.

Before we tackled the higher part of the climb (where the way led steeply upwards between treeless slopes and vertical sandstone cliffs) we set fire to the undergrowth. This is a means of clearing the crevices between rocks, and makes for an easier ascent. We waited one day after the fire, and then set out. Halfway through the climb we found ourselves black as chimney-sweeps—thanks to the ash and charcoal which covered our path. It was easier going than we'd reckoned on, and soon after midday we were all on the summit—all of us with the exception of Artur, who had found the pace too hot for him.

The Sarisariñama heights form part of the vast system of table-topped 133 mountains (or sierra) which rise in isolated massifs over the whole region bounded by the Rio Negro, the Rio Branco, the Atlantic, and the Orinoco and known geographically as Guiana. These mountains tower up suddenly from

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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133 the forest lands, and their tops are so high and so difficult of access that this has helped to preserve a biological world completely distinct not only from that of the surrounding lowlands of the Caroni, Paragua, Caura, and Orinoco valleys but also from that common to all other valleys in the American [114] continent. A few decades ago, when the aeroplane first enabled us to study these regions and their geological peculiarities, some observers proceeded to formulate wild theories which aroused more legitimate emotions in the breasts of explorers and scientists.

The formation of sandstone and conglomerate which overlays the original basic rock of this region to a depth of 2,500 metres was eroded almost completely on the periphery of these uplands, leaving the great flat-topped mountains isolated. This geological phenomenon began in the Secondary Era, when the plant and animal life on our planet was appreciably different from what it is today. The process of erosion continued right down to the ancient granite crust, while on the uplands flora and fauna continued as hitherto, restricted now to their new isolation. Communication between the heights and the plain became impossible. The pressure at 2,500 metres is very different from what it is at four hundred, and creates peculiar physiological changes in the organisms that adapt themselves to it.

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114 It seemed possible that the flat tops of these mountains, which from the air appeared to be covered with bush, would not only reveal unknown vegetable species but also animals which scientists believed to be extinct. Perhaps certain monsters from the Mesozoic age—the Saurians, it might be, the inspiration of so many fantasies—still lived and pastured in deep chasms scooped out by the waters of ages. Speculation wove many a scientific fantasy.

In reality, the monsters remained well and truly buried in their geological strata and no mountain could preserve forms of life surviving through a radical 137 change of atmospheric and geological conditions. What did come as a surprise, however, on these mountains—and the Sarisariñama itself proved the point—was an entirely individual flora: orchids, epiphytes, bromeliads and lianas of hitherto unknown types, which are likely to keep botanical students busy for a long time all over the world.

136 The usual fly-catchers, merry little birds I had already known closely on other high Guiana mountains, came to greet us. Never having seen animals bigger than themselves, these birds took us for strange trees with two big humid flowers distilling honey at the top: our eyes. First one of them came

along by himself and hopped round us twittering. Then he flew off, to return 136
a little while later with another in tow—perhaps the hen bird. Twittering again, he presented us to her as a fabulous discovery. They twittered a commentary and flew off, returning a little later, this time with a whole flock of friends. Then, with the courage that comes with numbers, they all made for our eyes to get at the honey. We were forced to disillusion them.

VIII

The Shirians have tobacco, *pihni* as they call it: even the most primitive and 276
savage of them, the Samatari, cultivate two things in some hidden corner of 249
the forest known only to themselves—tobacco, and the cane from which they make their arrows. Vice and war!

We were highly attracted towards the Uagna river lands, which, according 123 *
to Luis Antonio, was country rich in game and inhabited, or at least occasionally [136]
crossed, by the Samatari, who inspired terror all round them. Enrico, Momi, and I set out on an expedition there, leaving Jean and Artur to wait for the plane.

We stopped on the way at the Uarema settlement; Luis Antonio wanted to show us off to his people, who had never seen men with beards and wearing clothes.

That night we slept in a crowded hut, and our curiosity was drawn towards 123 *
a young woman who had strung her hammock between those of Uarema's 548
two nephews (whose persons were adorned with feathers and plumes). She stayed in all day as well, a cosseted Shirian Cleopatra, continually looking at herself in the little glass we had given her and adjusting the white feather boa which covered her ears and her shoulders. During the course of the day other [302]
women came to help her with her toilet, painting her cheeks and forehead with [531]
certain precise geometrical designs: they used red and black colouring matter which when dry shone like enamel. Even her little quid of tobacco was smaller and daintier than others used. Uarema told us that she was the public woman of the tribe.

Next morning, when we were stepping into our boats again, Pancho and 123 *
Benito came along in a big canoe. They wanted salt from us. We had very little, and had to refuse them. They went off in silence. When they were two hundred yards away, they shouted something in our direction. Luis Antonio

*
123 replied. Another shout was hurled at us. This repartee continued for some time, till Pancho and his brothers disappeared round a bend in the river. Our guide gave us a rough and ready translation of the insults exchanged.

'Let go these bad men,' Pancho had advised. 'These bad men who won't give us salt.'

'I won't let them go, because they give me salt right enough,' Luis Antonio had replied.

'Let go of them. They're bad men.'

'No, I won't let go. They're good.'

'Let them go, or else next time I see you, you and your people, I'll put an arrow in your belly.'

'And I'll call up their aeroplane, and see your whole village goes up in smithereens with the Catholic Bomb!'

A certain linguistic confusion led the Shirians to call the '*bomba atomica*' the '*bomba cattolica*'.

[136] Our return journey was a triumph of navigation, and our boats were full of smoked venison. We saw many deer grazing in shallows where the tobacco-coloured waters were flecked with patches of green. A little while before we came out on to the Merevari, Uarema pointed out to us a gap or hole in the wall of forest. He said it was the 'gateway to the Samatari'. The river at once took on an atmosphere of mystery: through the smooth green cliffs of bamboo and kapok trees which towered up from the banks there breathed the chill wind of legendary evil.

We got back to our savannah to find the American girl, Jean, suffering from hysterical fits. Heavy rains had begun. Mountain and forest were veiled in greenish grey. Kirisochi became a swamp. From the Sarisariñama falls came a thunder that was like the voice of lands unexplored, an invitation to new voyages. A great project began to take shape in my mind.

Jean and Artur might wish to get back to civilization: Momi and Giovanni too. But Enrico and I had no intention of returning. For us, the expedition wouldn't really have begun until we were on our own, free to follow any course that took our fancy. An irresistible goal now lay before us: the land of the Samatari.

belonging to those who set out to save humanity. In the mass of the people, traditions linger long after they are forgotten by others: the more they are opposed, the more deep-seated, the more intimately part of the ancestral soul, as it were, do they become. Yet even the people themselves, the unsophisticated and unspoilt people, have abandoned all love for the serpent. 600

I remember in the Alps as a boy, hearing old ladies come out with a proverb: 'If the viper could smell and the blindworm could see, far fewer people there would be.' This heinous proverb sums up our supreme ignorance of everything connected with reptiles. The viper can smell very well, and the blindworm can see us, and there are plenty of people still—too many, most of them seem to think. And then again, fancy coupling the proud, the superb, the triumphant viper with that humble, unschooled mendicant, the blindworm!

II

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We had need of our old guide, Pancho, again, and we set off up river to see him in the *Pirata*. But we capsized in the rapids, losing our motor, our guns, cameras, cine-cameras, drinking vessels, and everything heavy. We retrieved nearly all of it in the end, but our crockery and hardware had gone for good. From that day forth, to make the smallest quantity of coffee, we were forced to resort to a three-gallon petrol can. A few days later Pancho came to us.

He didn't seem angry now. He had forgotten the incident at Uarema,? and Luis Antonio's threat to kill him with the 'Catholic Bomb'. The fact that this time we needed his help had given him a chance to be magnanimous, while he couldn't fail to note that our obstinate willingness to employ Shirians had brought us to the brink of ruin. This gave him additional self-assurance. He had emerged the victor from the long silence between us. The Soto Indians are very touchy about navigation: being conscious of their outstanding powers they tend to dismiss all other aspirants as inept and ridiculous amateurs. M [502]

Artur watched over Pancho as though the latter was a wild animal that might escape at any moment. The shipwreck had been the last straw for Artur, who was so anxious to get away that he promised the chief anything he wanted if he would set out at once. He announced, with loud and dramatic gestures, that Pancho could have the hammock, the groundsheet, trousers, shirt, the breech-loader gun, machetes, knives, and in addition, if Pancho would take him

[pp. 67-70 ^{71} not processed]

?[see pp. 65 - 66 ... Analyst]

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123 to Las Trinqueras he would buy him red cloth, flowered dresses for his womenfolk, and that supreme Indian luxury, powder and shot for the gun, and so on.

Pancho listened with a smile, every now and then giving a little scornful laugh, which might have meant rich contentment or just plain scepticism. He winked at us—mere neutral observers—with his horribly burnt eye.

Two days later a crew was ready. Pancho himself was not going, but our three travellers were to leave in two big canoes. In twenty days they would reach Las Trinqueras and from that point the rubber planters' launch would take them on to Ciudad Bolivar. We gave them a letter for the pilots of the air charter company with whom we had an agreement. They had failed us badly. We had made it clear to the plane when it had paid us its last visit, by putting a big notice on the strip, that we had one passenger to be taken off. Jean couldn't face the thought of the journey back by water. But they had not come for her, so she stayed with us. We told them that we would be expecting a plane on the Kirisochi field on either the fourteenth, fifteenth, or sixteenth of April.

After the three had gone, a vast silence seemed to settle on the forest, touching us as well. It was sad to have said good-bye to friends like Momi and Giovanni, but by way of compensation we now had a much better balanced party. I felt free, gloriously free. The field was mine now. I could push ahead with our work to the limit, with no ethical question marks bothering me, and no remorse.

We went off with the Shirians to pay a visit to Pulipuli and to look up a
[487] valuable fellow named Cesare. The Valley of the Moon can also be entered by way of the Canaracuni, along another valley which runs down from the same
[362] heights and is linked with the Canaracuni by a maze of paths. On every side there are Shirian huts, tiny dilapidated affairs, each in a little clearing threatened by
[361] the advance of the forest.

Cesare was not at home. In his stead we found a crowd of old acquaintances, one of them being an old Indian of great dignity whom we had nicknamed 'The Senator'. He had come to Kirisochi on our arrival there, he had been present while we were building our hut, and never had he done a hand's turn. He would watch others at work with a fine air of detachment which was really
[413] remarkable. He was truly sufficient unto himself. Most of the time he spent stretched out in a hammock—a very small one made of liana—with his feet higher than his head. Periodically he scratched his back with a stick prepared and reserved for just that purpose. One of those ivory back-scratchers with a

little hand, once fashionable in Europe, would probably have made an ideal 123*
present for him.

One day, however, a boy passed in front of him, dragging a great sheaf of palm leaves. The Senator stretched out his hand to touch them, as if making sure they were of good quality.

'The Senator has touched the leaves!' I shouted to the others, and from that moment anything The Senator did marked a red-letter day in our calendar.

But at home he was not a figure of quite the same dignity. His back-scratch- [439]
ing stick was now replaced by one of the machetes which his tribe had received
in payment from us. However, his smile when he saw us again made up for everything—even for that rash behaviour when he had broken the mystic spell of his immobility by stretching out his hand to touch the palm leaves.

We treated the usual cases of worms among the children and one or two not
very serious sores, and then returned to the beach, where Jean was waiting for
us with Caio and Sempronio. Two days later we were once more at Llantarigña, [126]
on our way to the Uarema settlement to make a retake of some film shots we
thought we had lost in our recent shipwreck.

The *mereis* were beautifully ripe on the Merevari banks, and at Llantarigña 123*
there was a gigantic tree, which Sempronio climbed like a monkey. From his 262
perch on high he threw the fruit down to us, but not before he had sampled the 126
best of them, chuckling and exclaiming in his delight. The *merei* is the red and fleshy fruit of the cashew nut tree. Common in tropical America, it is known on the lower Amazon as the *marañon*. Besides the juicy pulp, there is also the kernel which once freed from the bitter oil which impregnates it can be made into an excellent almond cake, as it is in Guiana.

When we had eaten our fill of these fruits, we decided to sacrifice the tree 123*
in order to re-take a scene for our film. We had been puzzling over it and so 126
far had found no satisfactory solution. The scene called for a beautiful tree falling into still water. A tree with fiery red fruits, which would make a tremendous splash. Several Indians would then jump in after the fruits as the current began to sweep them away. This venerable *merei* tree at Llantarigña seemed ideal for the purpose, both in its structure and its position, and we worked on it with our axes for an hour, while I myself, strategically placed with the camera, waited for the big scene. But when the tree did come down the Indians were all on top of me, hurrying out of the way of its fall, so that the foreground of the picture was thick with figures dancing about in clumsy

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agitation. This experience decided us to scrap the whole scene and to substitute for it one of an explorer gazing into the blue.

At the *maloca*, as the settlement of a native tribe is called in Venezuela, we should be able to re-take some of the scenes we had lost. It would be a two or three days' job. But unexpected difficulties cropped up. In the first place we had nothing left to give the 'cast' and even the most primitive Indian will not do anything for nothing. Then there was a fresh difficulty. When we opened the cases to set up our cine-camera the Indians held a brief discussion among themselves and then went off as if they were all suddenly afraid. We called together all our old actors who had taken part so enthusiastically the time before, but even they refused with a 'but'—which meant 'no', very curtly and decisively pronounced. Luis Antonio explained how matters stood, wearing that malicious smile which he assumed as a defensive mask every time the occasion arose for him to state an Indian opinion which contrasted with our own. We realized that he was for ever on tenterhooks between our own 'rationality' and assurance and the ideas of his own race, which may have been ridiculous at times, but were nevertheless deep-seated and instinctive.

By looking into the sights of a cine-camera, people can see themselves so reduced in size that they are smaller than insects. This fact was not lost on the Guayca Indians. At first, it amused them: sending them into savage shrieks of laughter. But then a great thought had occurred to somebody: if the machine could so reduce them in size, it would have the same effect on their strength too—and they would be left defenceless.

It was now clear that we were up to no good. We were turning them into tinies, so as to be able to conquer them with no trouble at all. This was an unexpected blow to us. We could do nothing but give up and move on, much to the amusement of the youngsters who thronged round us—if there was any fun to be had, trust them never to be far away, even if they didn't know what all the excitement was about.

Convincing them that the cinema apparatus was harmless took a long, long time. We showed them that we ourselves were not haunted by the fear of being dwarfed: one of us would strike a pose in front of the camera while another operated it, and go right up close enough to touch the lens. Gradually the air cleared, their spirits rose and they began to grin and laugh, until even the suspicions of the most grudging were lulled. Luis Antonio, always capricious but nevertheless ready and willing to help when we were really in need of him,

not only let us take his picture but begged us to take it again, with his wife 123 *
beside him. Then he caused general merriment by posing beside the 'public 126
woman' who was painted and dolled up like a bird of paradise. In a third take, [548]
he stood between the two women, caressing their breasts in an excess of zeal. At this, enthusiasm knew no bounds. Even Uarema's brother, a venerable figure with his head crowned with the scars of old battles, burst into such a vehement laugh that he lost his horrible quid of tobacco. This change of mood enabled us to get on with our job. But our takes were often interrupted, for Uarema had started a vogue and couples would come along and insist on being photographed in their full feather rig.

III

For our forthcoming river trips we were anxious to engage one of Luis Antonio's many brothers, who was apparently of the same age and had the reputation of being the tribe's most experienced traveller. To a certain extent he was even familiar with the Samatari on the other side of the cordillera. But his wife was expecting a child, so that he was prevented from going very far away from home. This seemed to us the most natural thing in the world. The wife was a tiny little lady, her only sign of maturity being her enormous belly, which very clearly did not owe its size to the swelling caused by internal parasites, the privileged possession of these women and children. Without this evidence of pregnancy she might have been taken for a girl of ten.

'The birth will come any day now,' Luis Antonio told us. 'But my brother [846]
won't be able to start straight away. He'll have to rest.'

We were reminded of the ritual of childbirth which with a few variations 842
here and there is practised by all the Indians of tropical America. It affects the
husbands as well as the wives and at bottom, in its way, contains a certain 846
realism, characteristic of primitive peoples. Like us, they accept the principle of cause and effect and they do not really ascribe the pregnancy to strange half-magic phenomena. They know its cause for what it is—man, and his erotic acts. The effect, for them, is not in the woman herself: she is only a means, a [562]
vehicle. The true effect is the child. Up to this point, their attitude is no different from ours. The different point of view comes with the valuation placed by the Indians upon the cause after the effect has been produced. They see the role of

842 846 the male as continuing in importance not only after conception—at which stage, in our own positivist scientific view, the male role ceases to count—but for a certain period after the actual birth. The male, the cause, is still in the picture, according to the Indian mind, when the mother and child are living a normal life.

843 844 [128] [115] I had known other native peoples, and in regard to these Indian beliefs on the subject of childbirth, Luis Antonio confirmed what had already come to my knowledge.

[825] [846] 'In order for the birth to be a success,' he told me, 'when the wife is five months gone, the husband should stop eating peccary, snake or *caribe* (the name given in Venezuela to the carnivorous fish known in Brazil as *piranha*), and the flesh of any animal of an aggressive nature.' (Here, principles of hygiene were mingled with elements of magic, as happens also in the more advanced religions.) 'Then, before the birth, during the birth and after, the man must stay in the hammock without stirring, because any strain on his part, or any mishap that came his way, would affect the child and might have dire results.'

[562] The explanation sounds quite normal and natural once one admits the principle of continued causation in the man, the woman being regarded simply as a means. In fact there is no need for her to obey the injunction to stay in the hammock. She will continue her daily round until she feels 'something break inside her'. Then, with the midwife, she will hurry to the appointed place on the river-bank.

*123 844 I once had the chance of being present at a birth. I was with the Taurepan Indians of the Gran Sabana, and I watched hidden behind a cluster of Mauritius palm, where I could follow the principal stages of the proceedings. The woman, with her head tilted back, was seated on the clay bank in a sort of armchair shaped hollow which had been scooped out—whether naturally or made for the purpose I do not know. The midwife knelt at her feet, waiting. For some time both remained in this position. The woman kept giving little cries—but not really cries of pain. After a brief labour, the mother uttered one long howl which sounded to me like an 'u . . . u . . . uh' of rapture, and the midwife rose to her feet, holding up a tiny, mottled infant head downwards by the heels.

Still holding the baby by the feet, the old lady washed him in the river——with exactly the motions you might expect from a washerwoman giving the final rinsing to some heavy garment. I couldn't see the next step, but a few

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minutes later the two women were quietly walking home with the baby, who appeared to [illegible] dead. 844

While the mother goes about her normal tasks, with the child tied on her back all the time, the father stays in the hammock, absolutely motionless, eating nothing but fruit and palm-hearts—'they don't heat the blood,' Luis Antonio assured us. 846 [262]

Among the Guiana-Amazon Indians I have never heard of the father himself suffering from birth-pangs during this period of rest. Such reports, however, have come from travellers and observers of the Indian tribes inhabiting the southern regions of the lower Amazon. Before one can believe them one must accept a little more than the theory of the inter-relation of cause and effect. A good dose of barefaced auto-suggestion would also be needed to account for this phenomenon, and only the most undeveloped of the Indians would be capable of it.

IV

Of kindred interest, while we are on the subject of childbirth, is the organization of Indian society. It has been asked whether the pattern is patriarchal or matriarchal, and what part is played by the individual family. 611 594

If the question is limited to the Shirians, the answer is simple: they have reached no stage of organization above the rudimentary animal level. The family has the sole function of producing life and protecting it until the offspring is capable of fending for itself. Their society is not patriarchal, because the role of the family ceases where its physical functions cease, at the point where, in civilized societies, moral functions begin. Nor is the pattern matriarchal, because the women are held in a form of slavery, though the very lack of an exact social system means that they sometimes emerge from this to become the companions of the men—a state of affairs which may be regarded as more emancipated, or less. [562]

The children of both sexes, while they are young, remain the exclusive responsibility of the women, but when the boys reach an age at which they can do without their mothers (this generally means as soon as they cease to be breast-fed) they become independent males and do not belong to anybody in particular. Up to a certain point the father is free to pick out one who may be 858 [855] 593 858 428

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858 especially strong and intelligent, and keep him at his side, adopting him, as it
428 were, as his successor. The little girls continue to live in the feminine world of
858 their tribe. Shy and submissive, they take on the humblest tasks, fetching water,
857 making the fire and helping in the preparation—highly problematical—of food.

101 Such definitions of customs have, however, only a relative value, like any
177 attempt to estimate the Shirian way of life: for Shirians are to be found spread over wild territory of vast extent. Their customs are less well defined than one might suppose after reading certain tracts about primitive peoples—the Pacific islanders, for instance. These give the impression that with slight formal changes only, Western culture might have much to learn from the degree of social
[628] organization they have attained to. The Shirian tribes, cut off from one another as they are by physical barriers such as mountains and rivers, and moral barriers like the ceaseless state of war which exists between the various branches of this race of 'howling Indians', have developed their own customs in their own sporadic fashion. Sometimes they have been weakened by contact with foreigners, such as the Makiritari in the north-west and the Makushi in the east. More often they have been weakened by a lack of strong traditions, which do not spring easily from such an excessively low level of culture, where mere survival calls for an unending struggle against the tremendous power of the eternally hostile forest.

121 The most primitive races are those most affected by their geographical setting. Their environment conditions them. Only by adapting themselves continually to their surroundings, only by the long process of response to the determining factor of geography, can they create that growing racial identity which at last succeeds in reversing the process—that is, in conditioning the surroundings instead of being conditioned by them. But we are here touching on the larger question of the development of civilization generally.

133 Where the Shirians are concerned, we are still at the beginning of the
101 beginning, when geography is the absolute determining factor. Here environment is the master of man—a creature inferior, qualitatively and quantitatively, to the region which it is his fate to inhabit.

The territory they occupy is immense. Divided though it may be by great cordilleras, which make it the breeding ground for various rivers rushing north, west and south, it possesses one marked characteristic throughout its whole extent: the sources and the headwaters of the rivers are contained in a sort of

island of unbroken forest, which is not crossed by any formidable water barrier. 133 101
If this were the case, the Shirians, who are pre-eminently a land people, would
be presented with an insurmountable obstacle.

North of the Brazilian frontier live the Shirians of the Canaracuni and the 101
Merevari. These are divided into various clans, the most important being the [614]
Uana-Dildep, the Haruao, the Oakadeli, the Kopali, the Hana-Dildep, the
Ukumatari, the Kona-Kona—they swarm like ants. Then there are the Guayca
Shirians of Uarema, lately established on the Merevari, but originally from the
Upper Uagna. Along the mountain watershed which extends, with frequent [361]
interruptions, from the Uagna to the centre of the highlands where the Uraricoera, the Ventuari and the Padamo rivers rise, one encounters the nomadic
Samatari—the 'people of the pineapple'—a fierce and savage race of howling
creatures that run in packs like animals.

The general term used by the Shirians to designate their most savage tribes [186]
is 'Guayca' (in their language, 'wild'). By the Guayca they sometimes mean the Samatari and sometimes the Ukumatari. On the Padamo and in the lowlands enclosed by the great mountains of Marahuaca and Duida—that is, to the south of the central ridge—they have spread right beyond the upper reaches of the Orinoco; though in these regions there are also many of the more peaceful Shirian peoples such as the Uaka on the Uesete, the Faricete, the Matacuni, the Kologli, the Haue, and the Ish'tich—the 'people of flowers and bananas'. The Guayca and the Samatari are also to be found east of the Padamo-Orinoco-Rio Parima watershed, in the wildest and least-known territory. Isolated groups, with a touch of the legendary about them, inhabit the fringe of this region: for instance, the Kasarape, credited by all Shirians with unparalleled ferocity and cruelty. The Kasarape inhabit the right bank of the Lower Uraricoera in Brazil, and no traveller appears to have visited them yet.

How numerous are the Shirians? No one can state a figure with any certainty, but it may be accepted that they run into many thousands, and taken together represent a block that outnumbers all other races and tribes inhabiting the Orinoco and Rio Branco basin. 161

I had asked Luis Antonio whether it would be possible for me to be present during the confinement of his kinswoman, presuming the happy event took place during our stay, but all I got for an answer was a doubtful 'I don't know' —the formula in which the Indian takes refuge when he does not know what to say. This did not quite deny the possibility, even if it did not encourage the 123*

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123 idea, so I kept my eye on the lady in case developments came quicker than was expected.

The day arrived when I believed my silent surveillance would be crowned with success. Actually I had fallen into an innocent error. By way of compensation, I certainly got a good laugh out of it. I had tailed the woman along a path fairly new to me, which she had taken as if she had no wish to advertise her whereabouts. I knew the path in its early stages, but had always assumed that it ended in a thick clump of bushes, progress being further discouraged by a big fallen tree-trunk. But when I reached this obstacle I saw no sign of my quarry. I then saw that the tree-trunk could be pushed aside, to reveal a fork in the path. From this point the track was well-worn, leading a good distance away from the hut. It didn't need much mental effort for me to realize what a clumsy mistake I had made. Behind a tree an Indian was attending to Nature's needs. I had ended up in the Guaycas' privy. The old man sent up a growl of protest at this intrusion of a bearded one in the sacred retreat. The only thing left to me was to turn back, with the air of having wandered there by chance.

514 It is interesting to observe that the Indians, while generally immodest to the point of indecency, regard the bodily functions as a matter for reticence and secrecy. They squat like women to urinate and for other purposes seek some remote and hidden place, as if well aware of the defencelessness of their situation at these moments. Thus they obey not only the all-important principles of hygiene, but those of security: and in a world like theirs, security is the more important.

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123 That same day we witnessed another interesting operation, if one of a

[122] different nature. On the morrow we were to start for Llantariña and the Shirians had already prepared a good supply of bananas and *mapuei* which they were bringing up in another boat. On the eve of this expedition every man jack we had engaged for it had disappeared—except Luis Antonio, who was swinging in his hammock with the public woman at his side.

[302] 'They've gone to get their hair cut in the other hut,' he told me, when I asked where they all could be—for all the world as if he was saying: 'They're at the barber's shop round the corner.'

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*123 We went off to the other hut, anxious to see the fun. It was Caio's turn. He was squatting on the ground in front of a pimply young woman who must have been his wife. She was giving him a perfect pudding-basin haircut, using instead of scissors the nails of her thumb and forefinger, which with the Indians

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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are extremely strong. One quick nip did all that was necessary, and the nails 302 worked with the precision of a pair of hairclippers. Beside her she had a little 123* heap of fine ash, into which she dipped her fingers after every two or three nips. Hairs which interfered with the desired style were plucked out in a manner which might have been expected to bring cries of pain from the patient, but Caio only smiled his usual sweet smile, as if he was apologizing for causing so much trouble.

This operation went on for a good many hours, and we didn't see the end of it. But that evening Caio, Sempronio, and Narcisum trooped into the big hut, proudly displaying haircuts of an enviable perfection.

V

Delay appeared to be the order of the day on the island. Uarema's brother, 123* the elderly one, failed to show up. We were waiting for him because we hoped he might prove a source of further information, and there was also a possibility that he might come with us, taking the place of the expectant father. We passed the time swimming, and walking through the Soto plantations, which had now been almost strangled by the forest. After turning over practically every leaf, [245] we found a few ripe pawpaws and plenty of *tupi*. The first-named is almost a wild fruit in this region: the Indians cultivate a small type no bigger than an orange but full of flavour. The second is the doubtful fruit of one of the solanacea, in shape, colour and flavour halfway between a tomato and a melon. We cooked these sometimes with salt, sometimes with sugar, and turned them into a kind of marmalade. At the first tasting it aroused our enthusiasm, but at the next it made us sick. We were forced to find some substitute for our pro- 122 visions, now reduced to very small quantities: we had no rice, tinned meat or white flour left, besides being out of other more important commodities, but we still had plenty of coffee—though not sugar—and salt and powdered milk.

All our expeditions from now on, especially the Samatari venture which we were silently preparing, would have to rely on hunting and fishing for supplies. All we could take with us was coffee, which Enrico and I could drink unsweetened, and plenty of salt, with a little powdered milk 'in case of sickness', we told each other cheerfully. For this contingency, we didn't lack for medical supplies. As always, we had more than we could comfortably carry.

M 123 In the place of Hashimo, Uarema's elderly brother, we received an unexpected visit from two Sotos from the Upper Merevari. One was a mere youth, the other a good deal older, both of them as elegant as two young ladies, but with the bearing of true mountain folk for all that. The older was called M [551] Murucuyo—Morrocoy, that is, or Turtle. He was a chief from the headwaters of the Merevari, and the first Indian we encountered who gave us his real name quite openly. The Makiritari are always very reticent about their names, as if they are half-ashamed of them, and will sooner tell you they have no name at all, if they cannot lay claim to something 'rational' like Ramon or Pedro.

M [302] Murucuyo wasn't much of a talker, while the younger man spent most of the time beautifying himself. His face painting was highly elaborate and his M [439] coiffure was so impeccably styled that it would have made a statue sigh with envy. These two had come from their home on the upper Merevari to see Y M [609] about a little business to do with boats for Pancho. The Shirians assailed them with questions, demanding answers with a rudely aggressive authority that was partly derived from our own presence among them, and Murucuyo grew quite frightened, shouting '*Taimà, taimà*'—the Shirian for 'I don't know, I don't understand.'

What we fortunately did succeed in making them understand was that they should take Jean with them, so that she could go to Pancho's place, and M [574] our heavy baggage could go with her. The girl could wait for us at the chief's hut, where there would be the Makiritari womenfolk, as inquisitive and full of chatter as monkeys, but kind and friendly, especially towards another woman. The two men were quite willing to take her, especially when we tried to make up for the linguistic poverty which hampered our conversation by adding a little gift or two. We summed up the two pilgrims and decided on a few things which would appeal to their vanity most: two mirrors, a comb and a lipstick. The lipstick was Jean's, and the Guayca snarled with greed when they saw it.

We advised Jean to stay quietly with Pancho, studying the Makiritari language and treating the women and children's ailments. And when the three of them disappeared round the river-bend, where the island ends and the Llentara rapids begin, Enrico and I looked at each other: we felt absolutely free. Guiana and the Amazon, with all their forests, with all their howling populace of men and apes, were open to us. Only then could we be quite sure that the Samatari venture, which we'd dreamed of and dreaded too, would actually take shape.

It did not take us a great deal of time to organize the expedition. The question of food supplies didn't arise. We had given the little we had left to Jean. We were going among the Samatari like Samatari ourselves. The forest land of Uagna and the Rio Branco was waiting for us with its tapirs and its deer, serenely at pasture in the rich water-grass; with its ripened fruits falling from the trees into streams of dark water; with its birds whose crops were full of that fruit, and its fish which no barbasco had threatened for decades now, ever since the Guayca migrated to the north; with its fat grubs forming white silken cocoons in the trees. In the sharpness of our longing for the uncharted scene and for peoples still unknown, we saw ourselves already, in our imagination, plunging into the hidden depths of the forest, and the forest, in its turn, taking us to its bosom like a mother, boundlessly wise, providing for all our needs.

Hashimo arrived the next day and so far as we could judge from the preparations he had made and the quantity of arrows he was carrying, he had decided to come with us. So began the palavers between the four of us—Enrico and I on one side, Uarema and Hashimo on the other. We went into everything. Hashimo had lived as a boy in the region we wanted to explore; he knew the Samatari and at times he claimed to be on friendly terms with them, so that it was he more than anyone who knew the problems we might have to face. From the Samatari 'gate', which we had already seen on the Uagna, our path lay over exactly thirty-two hills. The Indian made the same gesture as he would have used to greet us and numbered them off with his hand, his eyes closed and the whole scene passing in front of his mind's eye. Thirty-two—not one less—and some so high that the speaker groaned with exhaustion as he enumerated them, as if he were trying to push some great stone over the top. After these hills, which would mean a six days' march from the landing, one reached the River Aracosa. After descending that, there was the Pacima (the Shirian name [103]
for the Upper Uraricoera), as far as a big falls. Then more *pilishie* and *masechi* —daily stages and night stops—and landmarks on the way, until the traveller came to the Samatari.

Considering that this people ranged like monkeys over a region which extended for hundreds of miles, we could not understand how he could be so definite about their present whereabouts—especially since he hadn't seen the place himself for many years. But the Indian mind is capable of subtleties beyond our imagining.

Y 114 Aracosa. There was something about the ring of the name. At last I pinned it down. I had seen it in an account of the journeys made by a certain Theodor M [103] Koch-Grünberg—a German who from 1911 to 1913 made a long trip from the Roraima savannah to the Upper Orinoco. He left a record of it in a famous five-volume work—a worthy monument to his venture. In Makiritari, *aracosa* means 'gun': it is a corruption of the old Spanish word *arcabuz*—arquebus. Koch-Grünberg had reached its mouth, and it was here that he made his first contact with the Shirianas. Unfortunately he was unable to keep in touch with them for any length of time and only visited the isolated elements he met with in the course of his journey.

M [186] This German explorer naturally made the expedition in the company of Makushi and Makiritari Indians, who live in holy terror of the tribes they call Guaharibo. Their fear may not always be justified, for a good many Guaharibo have now settled down to a mild and perfectly harmless way of life. But they still arouse a rancorous contempt in other tribes. Koch-Grünberg returned to the same region eleven years later, when he made the journey up the Rio Branco, irresistibly drawn towards these people whom he could not understand and whom he described in his book as forming an '*isolierte Gruppe*'—an isolated group, with no affinities to other races. But at the very gateway of their world he died of fever, and his expedition (which had been organized by Hamilton-Rice) after losing its chief, packed its bags and turned south again.

VI

* Y 123 [122] We left for the Samatari country on March 16th, accompanied by Userama, Sempronio, and Hashimo, the latter's fee as guide being nothing less than my own fur jacket. Caio, for some inexplicable reason, had quietly declined to come with us. We embarked in a canoe acquired from Pancho's father, and in this swift, light craft we made easy progress up the flooded Merevari.

Heavy rain set in, for whole days at a time. Progress slowed down. The Indians grew weary and there was no more singing and laughter from them. The second evening out, when we had slung our hammocks in a hut we had made on an earlier trip, Luis Antonio told us that his brother wanted to quit: there was not enough cassava—we had brought about twenty pounds.

'You had time to prepare as much as you wanted,' I answered him shortly, for I had half-expected some such excuse. 'That means that if you only prepared a little, you thought everything would go well and it would be enough. We are going on.'

Luis Antonio said no more. The expedition continued next day, if not with the same goodwill.

In the evening we expected further opposition to our plans on the part of the capricious Guayca, but we didn't know what form the new protest would take.

'Hashimo says the canoe is too small. With the river in spate, we risk going under.' So the pretext had been found: but it was too puerile, and easy enough to refute.

'We've got so far in this canoe,' I said, 'and everything has gone well. However high the river, we've kept on it and not under it.' (This was putting it in a very simple way, but it went down with the Indians.) 'Besides,' I added, 'to turn back now is more dangerous than going on. You know well enough that in going down river there's a far greater danger of capsizing. When we return, you will see that the waters will have fallen.'

'I don't know,' said Uarema finally, jumping into his hammock.

That 'when we return' seemed to me to echo hollowly from a very long way off: I had the impression that time was stretching out before us into an infinity from which there was no return. When we return, the waters will have fallen. . . .

Under the steady hiss of the rain, which veiled the river in driving sheets of cold spray, we reached the mouth of the Uagna. But before turning into it, to our great amazement we saw a canoe paddled by three Indians we knew well: Narcissus, Luis Antonio's nephew, Solitan and a boy we had already seen in Uarema's hut. Swirling down with the current, they shouted a greeting and with some difficulty drew in under a tree and stopped to talk to us.

'Will you ask where this lot have come from and where they're going?' I asked Uarema, for this surprise meeting in such a craft in such a hurry seemed to me somehow connected with the discontent of our own crew and their reluctance to continue; and Enrico and I were beginning to lose patience.

'These three went ahead to wait for us and then go on with us. But they were afraid of the flooded state of the river, and turned back.'

I seized the opportunity to hammer home our firm intention to continue. It was a delicate moment, for if all the Indians had taken it into their heads to

*123 turn back at this point, for fear of the swollen river, we could not have stopped them.

'Tell them to turn their canoe and come along with us,' I shouted, with a confidence I was far from feeling. 'We'll all go and see the Samatari.'

There was a moment's silence, and then the three newcomers suddenly turned round and went ahead of us in their canoe. It was so dilapidated and out of shape that to tell the truth I was surprised it had stood up to the Merevari's fury till now.

'Solituan is a Samatari who has lived with us for a long, long time. We sent him ahead so that he could prepare his people for our coming, so as not to take them by surprise. But he was afraid of the Merevari and turned back.'

We now began to understand: the Indians, behaving in their usual way, had done everything in absolute secrecy. Solituan was a Samatari who lived with the Guayca. His very name, when once we came to think of it, meant in a general sense 'cousin or kinsman'. It indicated clearly that he was a guest, a friend. Narcissus was not a Guayca either, as Uarema now went on to tell us. He belonged to one of the Shirian tribes who live still further south than the Samatari, the Quadu-Dildep. He knew the region we should have to cross.

Thus the Uarema Indians had shown a perfect talent for organization in preparing for the trip. They had sent ahead a party uniquely qualified to smooth the way for us and advise the Samatari of our visit—thus averting the danger of the bearded visitors being ill-received because they'd appeared out of the blue. Yet in spite of all this wonderful staff work, these same Uarema had abandoned the journey without compunction, and were ready to leave the exploring party to its own fate in the forest, all for a caprice, because a sudden bout of lassitude coincided with the rainstorm. This fickle veering from 'let's go' at one minute to 'let's turn back' at the next is typical of primitive peoples. They act upon impulse, not conviction.

[126] We had just turned into the Uagna stream and I was filming the scene as our canoe advanced under the trailing lianas when the cine-camera gave a strange click and stopped. Water had seeped into the works at the time of our shipwreck and by now one of the springs had rusted away. Our hopes of bringing back a film of the Samatari had to be abandoned.

The dread gateway to the Samatari lands proved to be nothing more than a clearing which stopped short and led nowhere, for a heavy curtain of bamboo had come down on it, blocking the ancient path used by the savages. We had to use our machetes to open up a fair-sized space so that we could drag the canoes up on to dry ground beyond the reach of possible floods. Behind the bamboos we could see traces in the undergrowth of an old track, which after crossing thirty-two hills and the length of the Aracosa river would lead us to a horde of howling ape-men, who cultivated cane for their arrows, and nothing else. 123*

Uarema had a young dove which he had caught alive on the way along the Merevari, and was looking after it. He gave it the affectionate name of Pipa. Sempronio helped him by looking for little berries, which the pretty little bird took greedily. The others were meanwhile busy putting up a shelter for the night and clearing a little more space around it, while Hashimo and Solituan went off to make a brief reconnaissance of the all but vanished track. Uarema paid no attention to anything but his Pipa, calling its name softly and fondling it like a child. [231]

A love for animals always seems strange among these Indians, and when it exists it is subject to the wildest caprice. For instance, a monkey, after being brought up among them with every sign of affection, will suddenly become a comic target for their blunt arrows and die a slow death from its wounds. 825 152 123*

For the moment Uarema was lavishing all his affection on Pipa, and when I accidentally trod on the bird, squashing it flat as a pancake, he turned on me instinctively, as if he was going to throw himself on me: the Guayca Indian in him had suddenly come out, roused by this offence against his love for the poor little dove crushed under the foreigner's foot. But suddenly his mood changed and without a word he picked up the squashed bird, under whose wings there was still a flutter of life, and threw it far off, with an air of disgust.

Sempronio watched the incident, laughing very quietly as he always did and looking up at me: he seemed to regard me as some sort of personal protector of his own. Then he went off in search of Pipa. Rolled up in a few leaves, the bird was put aside for his private cuisine.

Sempronio came from Auai stock. He was a mere boy, not fully developed, and he had joined us in this Samatari venture simply because I had told him to come. 'He doesn't want to come, but you want him to, so he comes'—these were the exact words into which Uarema had translated Sempronio's brief remarks. And he came everywhere with us, even to the Samatari, who were considered by his own people—a good, *smiling* people, whose only remaining primitive trait lay in their inordinate passion for theft—to be monsters ready at 115 123* [186]

115
*123 any moment to fall on human beings and devour them. With us Sempronio knew no fear, and he always wore a smile. He would run round our legs like a puppy, and was always ready to do things, taking on the heaviest tasks under 115 the worst conditions. He ate with us. He ate purposefully and he went on 264 eating. His voracity had to be seen to be believed, when you considered his slim delicate build. He ate our rations. Then he ate the special ones which the Indians prepared for themselves, and on top of that he ate an endless number of [262] things which with great foresight he had collected on the way: grubs, honeycomb with brood cells, honey and all, small fish, worms, birds' eggs taken from the nest, frogs, young snakes, palm hearts from young palm trees—he ate everything with rapid and relentless mastication, cooking what could be cooked on the fire, and devouring the rest raw.

When he had eaten everything he would start a regular licking of his fingers, and of the leaves which might still be wet with the juices of whatever strange meats he had wrapped in them. Then he would prepare fresh delights with the innards of any game we ourselves had cooked, adding heads, claws, wing-sinews and any other odd tit-bits he could find. With a knife he would work on them like lightning. Each little delicacy was attacked at full speed, entrails were devoured, heads were crunched right up to the beak, claws cleaned of every shred of meat. Then came the time to inspect the bones we had thrown away. He split them with a knife, and if there was any marrow he could be trusted to suck it out. Finally, after a last careful lick of each finger in turn, Sempronio, the little fellow from the Shirian metropolis of Auai, would go to roost in his hammock over the fire which wrapped him in its warm blanket of heat.

4

Captured by the Samatari

1

WE HAD been trudging up and down the thirty-two hills for two days now, 123 *
and we could hardly believe there could be so many in these parts, 487
though Hashimo had been very definite on the point. But every time we asked him how many were left we got the same reply: without a word, he gave a grin that was half bored, half mischievous, and his characteristic gesture with all its morphological variations. The total indicated, allowing for the number of hills we had already climbed (and we kept a strict account) always came to thirty-two.

Without the old man's unerring instinct it would have been impossible to find the track the Samatari had once made use of in the course of their wars. It was covered with fallen trees, bamboo thickets had grown over it and rivulets and swampy patches obscured it since it had been abandoned, but he smelt it out. He climbed straight uphill where the trees were tallest and straightest, wound his way around and between the impacted trunks of the banyans, crossed valleys dense with undergrowth, wielding his machete with a will in great sweeps to right and left. He went up mountain streams and down them, losing them and finding them again at some point further on, beyond a clump of thick roots or on the other side of a thorny bush of Iriartea—and woe betide the unwary traveller who grabbed at this to help him up the slope!

Climbing a wooded hill is hard work and there is no compensation such as there is in open high country where one can see the landscape unfolding as one climbs. In front of us there was nothing but a mass of trees in the shape of a tilted, narrowing triangle, completely dark in its midst with slips of a brilliant sky to be seen towards the edges. Up on the summit, the triangle would disappear and the slips of sky would widen to form a bright horizon all around, as a kind of prelude to the blue bedazzlement of the whole sky. But no such heavens opened up overhead. It was just a case of going down again into the

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487 next valley, along spurs which inexplicably began to rise again between streams rushing madly in all directions, now away from us, now towards us, now to one side, now to the other, as if we had lost our sense of balance and were spinning round and round.

[136] Game was extremely scarce and the gun which Luis Antonio had brought went, alas, unused. This was a serious state of affairs: we had nothing in the way of rations but a little salt and were relying on hunting and finding fruit. Fishing in these tiny rushing streams was not likely to yield much. We had hardly anything with us except the gun, a hundred cartridges, our hammocks for the night and a few medical supplies—not so much for ourselves as for any Indians we met with, for experience had taught us that even the most ferocious of them would respond in friendly fashion and be grateful if we cured the sick. So there we were with our few rags of clothes, carrying our mystic handful of salt, humbly and nakedly challenging the great world of the wilds—those thirty-two hills, inhabited perhaps by strange creatures and criss-crossed with clear streams running in all directions. And out of the very humility of our position in the face of such tremendous odds we drew our hopes for the success of our undertaking, as if we were instinctively conscious of a fundamental justice in the life of the forest, which would not deny us its bounty.

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136 Some touch of enchantment, as in a legend, there must have been about us: the animals themselves seemed sensitive to it—those few at least who roamed these hills. The first morning we woke among the trees—we had camped on the bank of a sizeable stream which according to Hashimo flowed into the Uagna—I looked out of our rough shelter to see a lead-grey puma start silently by the water. The creature had the same contented look in his eyes as a dog has when going for a walk. I felt no alarm. I just watched quietly, with no thought of grabbing my gun or calling the others. After giving me a long, brotherly, understanding look, the puma crossed a little clear space and went off slowly, as he had come, through the cane-brake.

So-called fierce wild animals see in man a dangerous competitor and they don't want anything to do with him. We often chanced to strike a region across which there never had been any paths or trails. The first night as we settled down to sleep we could hear the screaming of wildcats, the roar of jaguars and the odd cry of the puma which sounds something like a night-bird's call. But by the next day all sound from the wild beasts had ceased. The scent of man had driven them away.

CAPTURED BY THE SAMATARI

Among the Indians generally, and the northern Guayca tribes, there is a 825
curious method of keeping wild animals at a distance which is based on this knowledge. They search round the streams for traces of the path the animals use when they go to drink. Then they scatter it with human excrement. If one of the creatures comes back that way, he will suddenly go bounding off across the width of the valley to seek refuge in the rocky heart of the mountain, such is his terror of the very traces of man.

Before we reached one table-topped hill which we had glimpsed from the 123*
last high point, Uarema killed an agouti. We ate it straight away, with a few 487
palm hearts from San Paulo palm trees which Sempronio and Solituan—the youngest and oldest members of our expedition—gathered as we went along, and carried with them like bunches of flowers. We camped on the sandstone heights, where the vegetation had thinned out and was soft and mossy, with great clusters of Spanish moss, drenched with water, clinging to the tree-trunks, orchids growing on the ground and curtains of lichen hanging from the trees instead of the lianas found at lower levels.

And with the change of vegetation at this altitude, there was a change of
atmosphere also. From the warm, heavy air of the plain, where one could feel [136]
a lush exuberance of life swelling the sap of every plant and setting a myriad little animals in motion, you passed to a region of cold silence, only broken at regular intervals by the lugubrious chant of the bell-bird, a bird with an astoundingly long white tail which, from concealment among the bushes, gives a call of long, mournful, metallic ring.

After our high spirits of the first day out, which the luxuriant life of the forest had sent even higher, now, on the heights, we were invaded by a sort of melancholy acceptance of these cool solitudes and their touch of death. We wanted to drop down again, to camp in some little valley where the chances of encountering animals were always greater; but the hour was very late, and we had to stay where we were for the night, on the south side. From here, as far as the eye could see, the humps of the mountains stretched out before us as we peered through the trees. They were covered with a thick dark green vegetation, absolutely uniform, and underneath it a hundred little streams drained into marshy depressions. Hashimo pointed out the hills with his usual gesture. Before we reached the Samatari, there were still eighteen more, or so we thought.

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All this time there was a certain difference between our own three guides and the party we had run into on the Merevari. The latter's attitude towards us remained one of dignified reserve. Narcissus alone would address us with an occasional word, or rather a chant. All he could say was a little jingle he had learned from us when we'd spent an evening dancing at Uarema's hut: '*Pera-ponzi, ponzi, pà*.'

Then, in my recollections of this trip, came a period of complete chaos. We were overtaken by such a swift series of events, quite out of the blue, that their exact sequence is blurred: for memory seizes not on the whole picture but on a detail here and a detail there. Perhaps these details are unconsciously selected as having an ulterior value which we don't understand.

I was in my hammock, and Enrico was in his. He was looking at something on the other side of our camp. Solituan and the others were some distance away, round a fire of their own, over which they were tossing panfuls of eggs (from wild hens) and dollops of grubs. From where I was lying I could only see Sempronio, who was getting the smoke in his eyes while he waited his turn to cook the agouti's innards. There wasn't any talking at all. Everyone was preoccupied with his own hunger.

In front of me something moved among a thick clump of clusia and sword-grass. There were Indians there. For a moment I thought they were our own men who had perhaps gone off a little way into the trees and were coming back. But behind me too, now, I was alarmingly conscious of movement. Without leaving my hammock I took a count: all our own men were present and correct. Other Indians appeared, without a word, without a sound. Sempronio had left his pan on the fire. A fixed, cold stare had come into his eyes.

Pushing aside a branch with his bow, his other hand pulling back an arrow ready to let it fly from the stretched cord, a young Indian came forward. He looked extraordinarily strong, but the only other extraordinary thing about him was something I did not take in at the time, though in that silence it cried out like a false note. Only some time later did I get the point clear in my memory: this Indian's youthful body was covered in whitish mud, as if he'd been blanco'ed. Behind him, in the half light where the dusk was already creeping round the trunks of the trees, there were three or four more figures, moving slowly and keeping out of sight. The arrow appeared to be pointed at me, but I couldn't be sure of this, while the Indian's stealthy advance brought him within a few feet of the fire. The silence continued. I wondered what the others would do. I couldn't see them: my eyes were fixed on the red point of that arrow. Even the gun was outside the range of my vision, nor did I think of it at the time, being too busy composing my features into an expression which might persuade the arrow to stop pointing right in my face! But at a certain point in that eternity, when the whole scene was as if frozen by the threatening weapon, I recollect seeing, out of the corner of my eye, over on the right where Narcissus was, another such silent figure with just another such arrow in his taut bow. Then from the same quarter, all hell broke loose. It was as if a dozen dogs had been trodden on in their sleep and were howling with rage and pain. Above the general pandemonium could be heard one strident voice: Solituan was trying to establish friendly relations with the strangers.

But I had an enemy all my own. He had come up from the other side of the fire now, and was holding the arrow just about level with Sempronio's scalp. It was trained on him and me equally: I was still motionless in my hammock. Then the arrow began slowly pointing downwards and the bow-string relaxed. The moment passed, and instead of the arrow it was my crowding fears that took flight, stampeding away into the past like a herd of wild cattle.

The man was on top of me in no time. In one movement, he tore off my shirt, and the buttons danced off it as he ripped. I had automatically got out of my hammock. My trousers fell out too, and the Indian grabbed them immediately. He had put his bow down near Sempronio, who stood as still as a statue. Then the brute got hold of my shoes. Now that there was nothing left to excite his greed, I waited, expecting from one moment to another to see some change in these aggressive tactics. And then, suddenly, after he had grabbed the shoes, he let out the howl which the Shirians utter when they are thunderstruck, or in the grip of strong emotion, and left me alone for a while. He went behind the hammock. I heard nothing, but the same thing was probably happening all over again. Not daring to move, I craned my neck till I could see Enrico. He was completely nude, so white that for the moment he seemed phosphorescent in the half dark beneath our roof of leaves. A few minutes later our own men were stripped too, Sempronio among them: in the

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manner of Indians used to wearing a loincloth, he was holding one hand round his genitals. His head was bent down over the fire, where the eternal panful of grubs was now burnt beyond recall.

Then there began a really wild hurly-burly. The two of us, Enrico and I, naked but apparently free, didn't know what to be about. We looked all round us, trying as far as we could to keep track of our assailants. There were ten or twelve of them in all, howling and waving our clothes and the plundered red loincloths in the air, and brandishing their bows and arrows. Luis Antonio had prudently left the gun on the cross-poles of our roof, but the savages had soon discovered it. They were looking up at it, not daring to touch it, with excited cries of '*Bombamadé, bombamadé-epere*'—'Big gun!'

For all the crazy excitement of both Guayca and Samatari, there were no acts of violence, and our alarm slowly dwindled to mere shame at our nudity, for which our beards provided about as much cover as a tuft of grass on a cliff-face. Luis Antonio made no reply to our questions, nor did he reply to anyone, unlike his brother-tribesmen who were howling and cursing and trying to make our attackers understand how friendly our intentions were, slipping in an occasional threat now and then, because among primitive peoples offers of friendship may very well be accompanied by hints as to the inadvisability of refusing it. This was emphasized by Hashimo and Solituan, whose 'bombamadé' was a real verbal explosion: it crashed out of their mouths, at the end of every sentence—but by the way it set them dancing about it might have been bursting under their feet.

My own man, the one covered with clay, had put on my things: the shirt inside out and open because the buttons had been torn off, although even if they had still been there, he would not have had the skill to make use of them.

We were in terror of our lives no longer, but there were other terrors, less mortal but no less intense, to fill our minds. After us, our hammocks: they had been examined, but for some mysterious reason left alone—almost with contempt. The main worry was the gun. 'Bombamadé' was the word we heard most as that particular night fell on the highlands, accompanied by the bell-bird's spacing song and the excited antics of the half-clad Samatari, torn between their bows and arrows and their plunder, between merriment and ferocity, between friendship and hatred for this strange crew they had met on their hunting expedition.

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When things calmed down and Solituan, skipping round the fire, could be heard putting our case for friendly relations, Enrico and I could take note of the realities of the situation. We had been attacked by a dozen Samatari, savages who gave little sign of being any different from other Shirians, if you allowed for their greater squalor and a suggestion of something that might be called ferocity. This quality was most clearly to be read in the corners of their mouths and their bloodshot eyes: they had something of the look of a man coming out of a fit after foaming at the mouth. Their attention may have been drawn to us by the smell of smoke, to which Indians are acutely sensitive: more probably the sound of the shot which had killed the agouti had reached their ears. Unless our reading of events was mistaken, these twelve devils had been moved more by cupidity and fear than by downright savagery.

Cupidity and fear spring directly from poverty and ignorance, and it didn't need the Samatari—the most savage people in the world—to prove this to us. The thing to do, if this was how matters stood, was to try and find some way of dealing with them. Their cupidity was satisfied now, and as a result we ourselves were stripped naked—rather horribly so, as if they'd stripped off our skins, too. As for their fear—this represented difficulties still to be overcome, chiefly that concerning the gun, which as yet no one had dared to touch. But the Samataris' eyes were never off the weapon for long. They were well aware of the danger that lurked there, and it was unlikely that they would allow our own men to get hold of it.

'Keep an eye on the gun,' I'd told Luis Antonio. But this was only stressing the painfully obvious. I deserved no answer and I got none.

But the problem was shelved for the time being when two Samatari hung their hammocks underneath the fire-arm, to keep guard on it.

Gathering up their loot, the rest of the Samatari took their places methodically enough in the two shelters we had put up. The more numerous group hung their hammocks near Solituan: we kept hoping that he would be recognized for what he was and his proffered friendship accepted. Sempronio had disappeared into his own little swinging bed. He lay face downwards, and it was a fair guess that he was weeping, while he waited, with the fatalism of primitive races, for time to pass and take his fears with it.

III

* 123

As suddenly as it had fallen, the darkness lifted from the tree-tops and we stood revealed more naked still, among a gathering of people who looked as tired, dirty, and worn-out as we did ourselves.

'We go to the Samatari,' Luis Antonio announced, holding his genitals in his hands like the rest of our men. 'It is one day from here, towards the Parima.' But he would say nothing more, refusing to answer our rapid stream of questions, which voiced the anxieties that had crowded in upon us during the quiet interval.

Our shoes had been abandoned by the Indians, who couldn't stand the pinch on their enormous feet. This meant one change for the better for us. We set off in the wake of the Samatari, who had decided to take the gun. One dwarfish creature was carrying it quite nonchalantly along with his own bow and arrows. Perhaps they had really come to believe that we were friendly after all, and the *bowhamedë* quite inoffensive. After a few minutes my own man, who seemed to be the chief of the little party (in any case he was the strongest and the darkest skinned) stopped to let his trousers drop. Till now he had been holding them with one hand underneath his billowing shirt. Clearly, such exotic garments had a certain prestige value which pleased his pride, but beyond that he had no use for them. He let them drop and just stepped out of them as if he was stepping out of a patch of mud. His colleague followed suit with the very long trousers he had taken off Enrico. I screwed up my courage and with no trouble from them at all put them back on. We now felt more ourselves.

The march went on all day without food and without any pause for rest. We managed to get a furtive drink now and then as we forded a stream. The geography of the country we were traversing offered nothing new. We climbed up and down the hills which we already knew from Hashimo's rather over-picturesque description, and we forded a whole network of streams littered with all the rocks in the mountain. No, the details of that march were not its geographical features but its psychological ones: fears, anxieties, despair, hope, and sudden bursts of optimism that shone like a lamp in a storm, and above all else the rising, silent tide of hunger.

With evening, when darkness was already blurring the boles of the trees,

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9. *Reading-matter reaches the Aua Shyriana.*

[p. 96-A]

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10. Luis Antonio prefers the local tobacco to our own civilized brands.

11 & 12. *Waroma's brothers-in-law.*

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[301]
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[P.96-B)

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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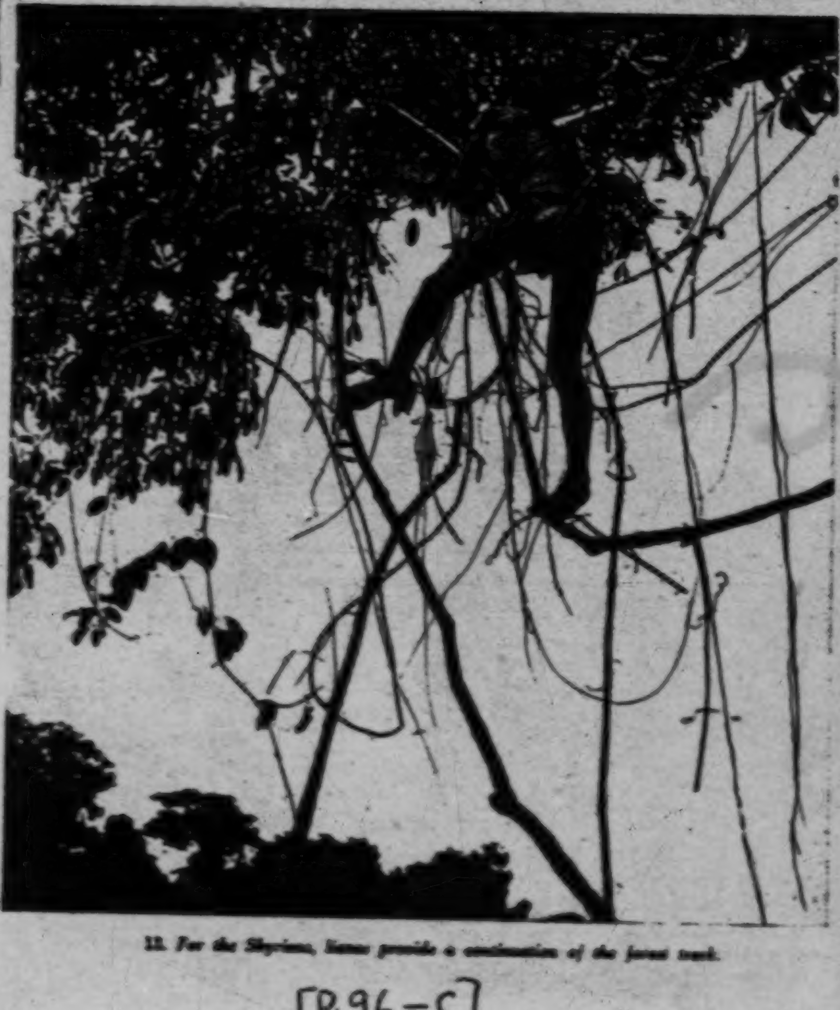

12. *For the Shiriana, lianas provide a continuation of the forest track.*

[P.96-C]

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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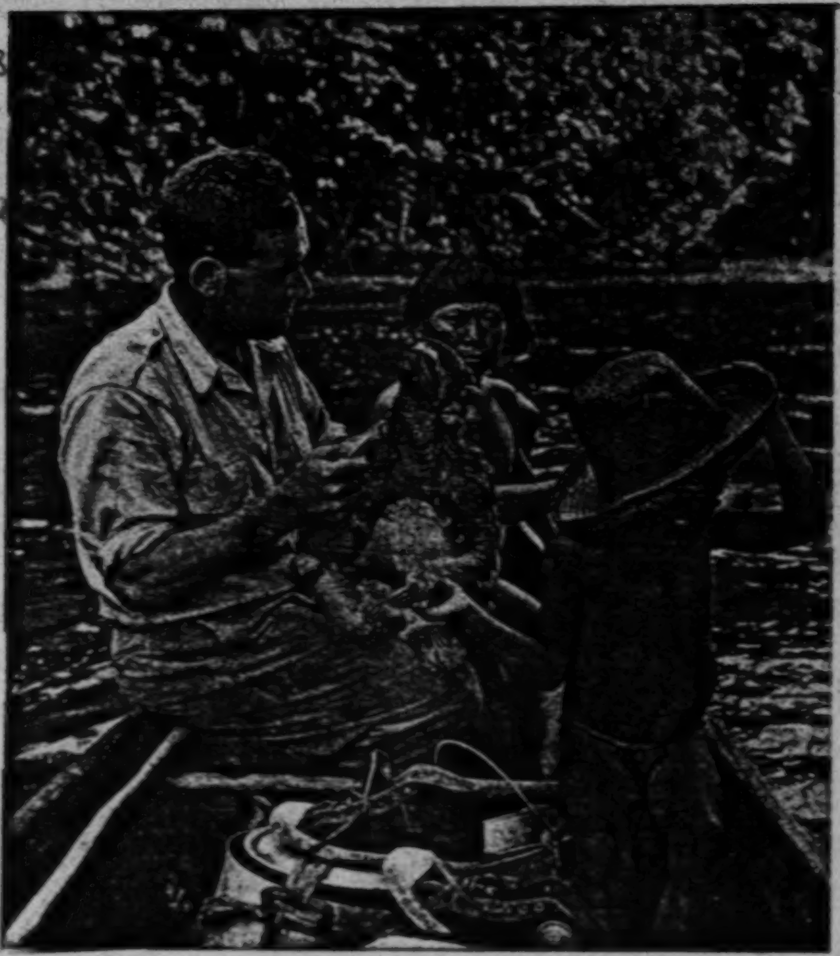

16. On the river Paqua: a sloth.

[p. 96 - D]

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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15. *Grubs make a tasty dish!*

16. *The fourth type of Samatari - the girlish.*

17. *The 'bad type' - playing a whistle made from a deer's shin-bone. Note the tribal signs on his stomach*

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302 ←

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[p. 96 - E]

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

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18. *Pancho makes his oars at home: the final smoothing stage.*

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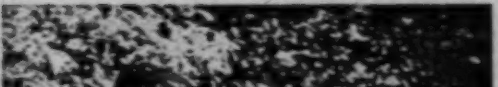

19. *Enrico and Pedro make a good catch in the [illegible].*

[p. 96 – F]

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20. The heron.

[p. 96-G]

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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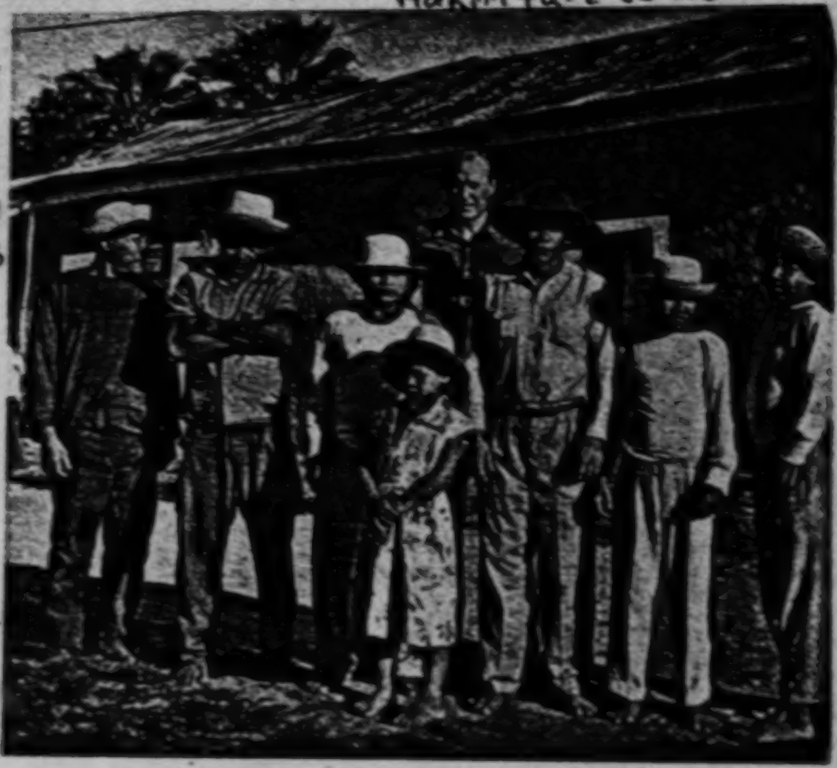

21. *The Indians of La Paragua have lost all but a shadow of their old proud personalities. Left to right: - Sapali, Pedro, Sabu, Pedro's wife, Sampronio, Thomasa. Enrico in background.*

[p 96 - H]

we found traces of a big encampment: here were the forked branches with the 123* rudimentary hammocks still slung from them. There had been fires here too, but the ashes were now cold. Bones and scraps of all sorts were scattered every- [262] where and in the centre of the area there was shining the great armoured back of an armadillo. This aroused everyone's curiosity, not least the Samataris'. They were probably thinking of the sumptuous banquet which this carcass had afforded, and we were very glad to see that the pangs of hunger were at that moment very real and very urgent for them, too.

The fact that the fires were cold convinced our captors that it would be a good idea to set up their own camp: there would be no likelihood tonight of catching up with the tribe that had passed this way. Things went so quietly that at times we forgot that we were prisoners: automatically we looked on the Samatari as our friends and guides, just like the Guayca Indians. But the illusion was brief: that evening we ate nothing, while our sharp-eyed hosts tucked into a mound of grubs they had collected *en route*. Then they belched [514] their way to their hammocks, from which the odours of their further digestion wafted down.

I thought of Sempronio who had had nothing to eat either, and wondered what had happened to his panful of agouti entrails which had been left burning the night before when we were attacked. It was really the thought of all those tit-bits being burnt and wasted which stopped me going to sleep.

Next day, a little before noon, while I was watching Enrico plodding along 123* with set jaw, sweating copiously (I might have been looking at my own image 203 in a glass) we heard a distant howling that sounded like monkeys. No one said anything. Our march continued until the howls became more distinct; and then, confused as we were, it dawned on us that the noise was being made by men and not by monkeys at all. Still we did not stop. The sounds were still coming from a long way off. Then, rounding the bend of a stream, we sensed that it was suddenly quite near: it was as if some monster were just ahead of us, peering at us through the trees on our immediate horizon. The howling went on. It was now close at hand, coming from ground level and from the trees—a sharp, disorderly confusion of noise.

The Samatari had come to a sudden standstill. They were discussing something among themselves. Every time this happened, our alarm quickened: some dark fate was surely being prepared for us. We were all in perfect Indian file, with Enrico and I in the middle, with the Guaycas behind us and three or

* 123 203 four of the Samatari bringing up the rear. Without warning, the Indians let out a powerful howl, pitched at the very top of the register, which silenced all the background forest noises for good and all. They kept up this ululation as they marched on, like a steamer coming into port, and we found ourselves joining in without realizing it, like men shouting in open country at night to keep their spirits up.

On the other side of the stream the Indians fell silent for a moment, as if intent on listening. Then they exploded with an exactly similar performance—this time in strict unison and on the same high note. Both parties were now howling together—in alarm, in friendship, in hate, in sorrow, in some mixture of human feelings which, for good or ill, must lift up a voice in protest against the hostile world that lay in silence all around. And this howling in unison that Enrico and I, lost in the forest, shared with a pack of savages of various and uncertain temper, filled us with emotions of unbearable intensity.

I remember that when we talked about it later on, when the danger was a thing of the past and only an absurd nostalgia remained, we agreed that this had been the most emotional moment of our lives—or at any rate, the moment in which our emotions had erupted more violently and more irresistibly than at any other time, to find expression in that universal howl.

* 123 It would be hard to describe the scene which followed when we came to that encampment, or to find words which would do it justice.

Ape-men came down from the trees and ran towards the camp centre, crowding together there in a wild tumult which immediately surged forward in a threatening advance towards us. Behind came the women carrying supplies of arrows and out-howling the men. When we appeared from behind the grimy backs of our captors the howling broke off momentarily and then began again in an altered tone, this time a medley of a hundred different individual yells.

When our column stopped we found ourselves surrounded by a mass of shrieking, dirty, malodorous humanity that leapt on us from all sides. My trousers were again stripped off me, from the rear. Once more they disappeared into a forest of legs, while the more persistent among the crowd first touched me tentatively as if I might bite, and then grew bolder and started putting their hands on me, rather as if I were a fish that was trying to dart away. My principal attraction for them lay in my beard and the hairs on my chest. A few—the lucky ones who managed to press to the front of this surging tide—went into action and stripped off tufts of this wonderful hair, exhibiting it triumphantly to the luckless ones behind, and sometimes passing it back to them while they themselves returned to mow the meadow for a little more. 123*

The more intimate parts of our anatomy they regarded with amazement, but it was our beards and our chests which really provoked their curiosity most. One of them, taller than the rest, brought his face very close to mine so as to get the feel of it better. Then began the process of rubbing faces. Every greasy millimetre of these Samatari visages was rubbed against mine, in what seemed some grotesque dance where my partner was continually changing and which went on for hours in the midst of a general uproar, till in the end I all but fainted away with weariness, hunger, and the animal stench that enveloped me. Enrico was nowhere to be seen. He was undergoing the same treatment somewhere else.

The behaviour of these savages was beyond our understanding. Some of them would hurl themselves at me and with an angry snarl grab hold of my beard as if they wanted to strangle me with it, or tear it off, skin and all, while others were gentler and content to utter their shrieks of wild excitement, joining in the attacks on my beard in much milder fashion, and only stroking it.

Then it was the turn of other details of our anatomies, so wonderfully strange to them. Each had its brief moment of celebrity—and danger. A metal tooth which they happened to catch sight of filled them with amazement. Very soon after they had discovered it, along came one of them with a pointed stick: he wanted to extract it. I was saved from this fate not so much by any action of my own as by the general commotion, which made the chances of performing any such delicate operation very remote.

Last on the list of wonders came our eyes, and the fact that our clear pupils could turn within an orbit. (I don't know what atrophy of the eye-muscles prevents the Samatari from doing the same, but their pupils remain motionless in the middle of the whites.) We had to turn our eyes this way and that way, up and down, until they were acutely painful and unable to focus correctly. (147)

They had treated my wrist-watch with some respect, believing it to be completely adherent to my arm, like some bodily organ; but now the catch of the strap sprang loose. It was stripped off at once and passed from hand to hand till it was lost to sight in the throng.

Behind the front ranks of the men were their womenfolk, urging them on

*123 to bolder measures against our bodies—indeed, they appeared to be giving their respective husbands peremptory orders to gain possession of our superhuman faculties, so that their own families should have the benefit. In which they were behaving like mothers of families and ambitious wives of every level of society all the world over! However, by the time they had begun to intervene, the whole orgy was beginning to slow down: now the Samatari were making first for Enrico, then for me, in the hope of finding some new marvel, having exhausted them nearly all.

The spectators were beginning to thin out when the Samatari I have called 'my own man' reappeared among them. He was no longer wearing my shirt, [142] and his whitened skin looked like powdered chalk. There was really something about his face which gave it a strange resemblance to my own— in the general bone structure if nothing else: he was of a type which differed slightly from the usual Mongolian-faced Shirian. It is no rare thing to come across these fundamental resemblances to somatic types common in Europe—even among the most remote and primitive races.

But this resemblance now suddenly assumed a terrifying significance when my own man started measuring his features against mine, spanning both with thumb and finger: he was trying to prove the similarity to make sure that my beard would fit him.

I was familiar enough with the tales the Makiritari Indians told about the Shirians. According to them, when the Shirians got hold of a bearded man they removed the beard, flesh and all, dried it out and stuck it on their own faces like a mask so as to appear in the guise of a white man. I'd always put this quaint tale down as just another Makiritari legend, since they were always eager to credit their neighbours with horrifying habits and most unlikely deeds. But here was 'my own man' with his plastered complexion and his ugly face and his strange resemblance to a white man who had come all the way from Italy, a quiet innocent land whose inhabitants need no such masks and are unacquainted with the Shirians.

Everyone round about was laughing. The man's intentions were becoming clearer all the time. Perhaps he, too, knew the story of the white-man's-mask, perhaps the Samatari told it about still more savage people—the white men themselves, for example? But no one will ever know for certain, for at that moment I developed some strong inventive faculty: face to face with death, I found a way back to life that was both safe and honourable! With gestures of great-hearted generosity. I pulled some hairs out of my beard and my chest 123* (though there were few enough left after the harvest!) and dabbed them on 'my own man's' disgusting chin, trying to make them stick there. He understood, and said something to the others, which resulted in the arrival on the scene of some pesemes. This is a vegetable gum, with which they set to work to glue firmly on to his chin these 'seeds' of human beard, which, I explained as best I could by howling, would spread and flourish in a short time.

'One Pulipuli,' I shouted, at the same time trying to manage a confident, hopeful laugh. 'In one month. Pulipuli.' Everyone took up the word with satisfaction, and the rest of them began to stick snippets of hairs on their own faces, trusting that they would become bearded men within a month!

All this time my trousers, as interesting exhibits, had gone the round of the whole tribe, meeting Enrico's on the way. In the space of a few hours, every pair of bronzed Samatari buttocks had been inserted into them.

Among these savages, various somatic types could be observed. They re- 123*
peated themselves with a striking uniformity in various individuals. Among 142
the odd hundred beings howling round us, I saw four that were basic: the pygmy, with clear skin, fine and well-marked features, a lively look and very small, nervous hands and feet; this type rarely exceeds four foot ten inches in height. The comparatively tall—a good example being my own man, with skin darker than any of the Makiritari, strong and thick-set, expression fierce. Then the Samatari of medium height and slightly muddy pigmentation, soft, almost feminine features, very small nose, tiny mouth and round head—a really girlish appearance altogether, this being even more strongly emphasized where the hair style showed a curious wave, and in two extremely exceptional cases where the eyes were brown and not black. Finally there was a fourth type, Mongolian or, perhaps, more accurately, Tartar—a type frequently met with in the basic physiognomy of the Brazilian half-breed: of medium height, and lean, the face ending in a pointed chin so that it looks like an isosceles triangle upside down. The expression is grim. Protruding cheekbones, almond eyes, and—exclusive to this type alone—a beard, even if it is only composed of a dozen hairs on the chin, left to grow in Chinese-Mandarin style.

The womenfolk were not attractive in appearance, as we had found those of other Shirian tribes—notably the Uarema and the Auai. Their short—very short—stature and lack of any womanly grace, together with their grim, almost evil, expression, gave them a general appearance that was more masculine than

* 123 142 feminine. The hard struggle for existence is naturally reflected more strongly in the women, the bearers of the race.

On the whole the Samatari, just as they speak much the same language, differ very little in other ways from the rest of the Shirians, except in so far as they are, so to speak, more typical. They represent the nearest approximation to the ideal Shirian, the physical symbol of the whole race. And paradoxically this 'ideal' quality could be seen in all four somatic varieties: each seemed the prototype of its kind.

As regards the pygmies, who were very much in the minority, it seems to me that here we have an ancient, autochthonous race, formerly conquered and then later assimilated by the Shirians, on an equal footing. To infer the reverse of this process would be absurd.

* 123 [291] The women were completely naked. Combined with their hairlessness and their filth, this hardly increased their feminine charm. The men went naked too, but following the custom of such Indians as wear no loincloth, their genitals were gathered up and bound tight to the lower belly with a string of liana wound round the body. However strange it may seem, this usage has nothing to do with modesty, being simply a device to keep one's unmentionables from getting caught on thorny undergrowth in the woods.

IV

The Samatari gradually retired to the shelter of the palm leaves, leaving only the roughest customers still hanging round Enrico and me. We were together again at last, while our Guayca guides had mysteriously disappeared into some hidden quarter of the encampment. As a last straw, parties who had been out hunting began to straggle back, a few at a time, while it was still daylight. Each little band of newcomers had no idea we were there, and each time we had to go through the same near-massacre.

Those who had already inspected us and qualified as experts on the nature of bearded men shouted the news to those who came later, well before they reached the camp-fire zone. These late-comers would run up to us and when they saw us, stop suddenly, with an expression of bemused cupidity filling their eyes. Then, uttering sharp little howls that reminded me of the jubilant yapping of a beast that has cornered its prey, they would hurl themselves on us

—and in order to make friends (or so we hoped!) we showered them with embraces and caresses and solemnly rubbed our beards into their dirty faces.

Our worst fears were over. But hunger remained, and there was no sort of solution for this. We were prisoners, and prisoners are given nothing to eat until the gears of bureaucracy have duly enmeshed. Our fear of dying by arrows had become a dread of dying from starvation, and this latter, all things considered, seemed the worse fate by a long way.

It was dark now. Dozens of fires were glowing among the trees, and the Samatari were bawling all round them. We were still coping with the last late arrivals, and with a mournful old man who had besieged me from the very first with a petulant insistence that was all his own. Now he wanted my trousers, which had taken a walk for a destination totally unknown; now he wanted my beard—and on top of that, something mysterious which was inside me. Apparently he could make use of it in his own body. He probably meant my health and strength, because later his attention was fixed on my loins, and he prodded them again and again, with endless lamentations.

Then, like two apparitions, Luis Antonio and Solitum arrived on the scene; the former had adopted the Samatari style for his genitals. They were followed by the usual comet's tail of gaolers, who escorted us to the far side of the encampment, where there was a sight more miraculous still—our own hammocks. They had been slung in the middle of a forest of others, small affairs made of liana and bark. These were all empty. The fact that our own were occupied by two or three Indians apiece, joking and laughing and cleaning up their dirty, greasy bodies, far from distressing us, sent our spirits still higher. For it meant that we were now part of the family The danger had passed.

The occupants obligingly got out and we flopped in, on our faces. Utter exhaustion had prevailed even over the pangs of hunger.

'There is nothing to eat,' said Luis Antonio in a most normal tone of voice, as if making a statement of purely academic interest, which did not have any personal application at all. We plied him with questions, but all we got out of him was his usual relentless 'I don't know'—and with that our first day among the Samatari came to an end, with the smoke of a hundred fires and the unbroken jabber of the Indians discussing us from the depths of their improbable hammocks. We had began our term of captivity in the hands of the Samatari, but we couldn't foresee its ending, or guess when that would be. The rising tide of hunger engulfed us, and the future became vague and shapeless. . . .

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262 The Samatari were eating all sorts of things: there were stacks of little green bundles, which would have made the smiling Sempronio die with envy. (Where he had disappeared to, we did not know.) These provisions were piled up under tiny roofs of leaves, beside little pyramids of nuts, green fruit, vari-coloured fruit, hard fruit and soft fruit. The grown-ups and children were tucking in without more ado. There were white grubs, a little on the hairy side, that had the exquisite savour of crayfish; putrid worms from the Mauritius Palm, looking like *gnocchi*; earthworms, squeezed and cleaned, their flesh the colour of loin of pork, or when they were served in heaps, rosy like spaghetti and tomato sauce. There were whole honeycombs taken from the wild bees, the cells full of brood; the look and smell of them was like rich pine-kernels;[1] bags of honey, which when mixed with water gave a cool, slightly heady drink; small snake-cutlets, like fleshy eels; gigantic Maripa Palm hearts broken into chunks, like crumbly Parmesan cheese; mounds of cut tapir meat and smoked slices of peccary, which were black as coal outside but all rosy and fragrant within, like the heart of a spring lamb. There were bundles of fish dried and toasted over the fire, which ate with something of the flavour of almond cake, though it was more exotic. . . .

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123 The leaf-wrapped viands hovered sizzling over the flames, and the greasy savours breathed out into the night air, so that the animal-lair atmosphere of the camp was wreathed in a homely smell of cooking. But for our part there was only hunger, stretching like a wide sea whose tides beat against the fertile shore of the Samatari land, with its sweet-smelling mountains and fruit and game and its propitiation to the gods of plenty—the duly gnawed bones hung up over the fire lest the smell of them should warn off the next day's bag.

But we, in our ocean of hunger, had at least one satisfaction—our hammocks, our warm and welcoming hammocks, made of stout cloth. They swung like glorious battleships over the wretched little flotilla of the tiny Samatari contraptions.

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123 The Samatari, whose possessions are so simple as to be almost non-existent,
352 have three types of hammock, depending upon the resources of the country
283 round about, since they never carry their sleeping gear with them but always improvise it on the spot, except in very special cases where the rich and great affect a snobbish luxury. The most elementary model is composed of three or four strips of the flexible bark of the Annona which is known in Guiana as

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[1] Used in Italian cooking.

Yara-Yara. These strips are a few centimetres wide, their ends being twisted 123*
into a rope and tied to two trees. Less common is the hammock made from the 352
rootstock of an Iriartea, the palm which tends to cling slyly to the traveller 283
with its thorns, lurking on the young shoots. The rootstock often lies above ground, twice the length of a man's arm and almost as thick. It is carefully stripped of its spines, which come off easily, and then clubbed to a pulp. In this way the very strong fibres are easily removed. They spread open very readily, and the Samatari are careful not to pulp the ends, leaving seven or eight inches of the rootstock intact so that it can be hung on to any convenient spur on a tree.

Finally there is the hammock de luxe, the one the nobs carry with them because it takes a certain amount of time to make and its more select raw material cannot be found everywhere. This is a superlatively strong liana known in Spanish as *alambrito*, or wire, because of its strength and its habit of growth.
Quite apart from its use for hammocks among the Shirians, this liana is one of [314]
the main forest products, being used for all sorts of purposes by all the inhabitants, from the most civilized to the most primitive. It serves for binding the walls of huts, for weaving and basketwork and, as we have said, for hammocks of a superior quality.

This liana is about as thick as a pencil and easy to peel and slip open into a number of pliable white strands rounded on one side and flat on the other. About a hundred of these strands, banded together halfway between the two
ends with twisted bark rope, make the hammock. It is strong and springy, but 352
alas, like all Shirian hammocks, unstable, uncomfortable, and very small. 513
Stretched out in them, with the imprint cutting deeply into their skin, the Samatari pass their nights without stirring, their feet on a higher level than their heads as if they were following the most modern therapeutic principles, smoking themselves in the piquant fumes of their fire, which is kept continually burning and replenished by the more youthful members of the tribe. The fire is their blanket—'the blanket of the night'—as they themselves call it.

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At some point during the night, Soliman turned up wearing my trousers. 123*
After they had made their mysterious rounds, it seemed, they had fallen to

123 his lot. At any rate, it was a sign for the better, since it meant that our old friend had been recognized for the Samatari he was. He restored my property, smiling his usual rather foolish smile, by simply letting them fall from his waist, and I saw that he had also got the red woollen drawers which Momi had bequeathed to me when he left us. Enrico's trousers were dawdling somewhere on the way, but they arrived in similar fashion in time for him to put them on in the morning.

'Do you think we can soon leave these people?' I asked Luis Antonio, who was lying awake nearby.

'Nothing doing,' came the answer. 'We've got to stay with them, otherwise they'll shoot every arrow they've got into our backs.'

'What about the gun?' I said at once.

'The gun is hanging up in an empty hut, with the chief watching it.'

So there was a chief, though he'd given no sign of himself: such a deep sense of dignity could not but do him honour.

'The chief has got your watch, too. He ordered your trousers to be given back to you, because he didn't want the Samatari women falling in love with you if they saw your genitals.'

Jealousy had been stronger than greed. This too was a good sign. It added one more grain of sand towards the foundations of our security.

The torrid night passed. The smoke of the fires was now enriched with the odours of burnt ants. Morning was born to the vociferous cries of the Samatari who were up and about before dawn, hunting and gathering fruit and supplies. Along came the chief, a man of middle age belonging to the Tartar type, with six long hairs sprouting on his dirty chin. In his hand he had the watch, still unharmed. He handed it to me without ceremony, seeming glad to get rid of it.

Later on I got to know the story connected with the watch.

Someone had noticed that not only were there parts of this golden object which most mysteriously went round and round, a strange tick-tick-tick came out of it too. There was a heart inside it. The watch was the animal, a potent animal of dubious powers, belonging to me and standing in some magical relationship to me. Wonderment was tinged now with fear, and the wise chief had therefore hurried to restore it to me before anything happened to him and his people.

On a sudden impulse, some inner prompting that could not be withstood, I proceeded to show my gratitude to the chief by offering him the red woollen 123* drawers which I had not yet put on. He studied them carefully, and then got into them as to the manner born. They fitted him well, and their colour being red, which Indians find irresistible, convinced him of the prestige value of this little scrap of clothing. Without a word he walked away with the solemn gait of a man who has had a pot of gold revealed to him in a vision. He made a tour of the encampment in stately fashion, and when he returned to us he was followed by a train of Samatari who were all clicking their tongues and emitting little deep-throated grunts. He stopped when he reached us, just beside me.

I carried on with the good work of thawing him. The watch was still in my hand, and I showed it to him, with signs that I was willing and anxious to explain the true nature of this metallic animal. The twelve figures for the hours, I told him, with swooping gestures eked out by a few words of Shirian, represented the fixed stars of the sky. The big hand was the sun, and the little one the moon. They followed each other through the firmament, among the stars. This explanation found the mark straight away—perhaps because it only went to confirm their own suppositions about the little animal which had been worrying them during the night.

'*Pilmore, pilmorokum*,' shouted the chief, and his followers danced about, echoing him, which seemed to mean that they had identified the watch with the sun and its circular motion. '*Pilmore, sepalite, lahallat*'—magic, big magic.

Then we were aware of some fresh surge of movement. It came mainly from the women. They had gathered for an animated discussion, which might have something to do with what Luis Antonio had said about the trousers. 829
Indian women find white men an irresistible attraction and their menfolk, in 626
all tribes, have one favourite tactic to prevent their being deceived: they tell
their wives that these damnable white men possess such gigantic, nay monstrous, 831
organs that they cause laceration and death. This legend is half-believed by the men themselves, partly by reason of the Europeans' actual superiority in regard to this important anatomical detail.

For once, however, it seemed that the Shirian ladies were not quite con- 123X
vinced. One of them could attest by the evidence of her own eyes that this 829
dreaded enormity was a disingenuous exaggeration. But the point had not been 831
generally confirmed, and it had started a discussion among the womenfolk. Men who had been listening to the explanation of the watch now joined in with much jeering and laughter. Enrico was obliged to yield his person to the

*123 829 831 general curiosity, and it was he who dispelled for ever the belief that white men were a danger in themselves, apart from their guns and other terrifying adjuncts. The women fell on him. In a frenzy of excitement they insisted on seeing everything: they might have been doctors. His trousers dropped and feminine curiosity was slowly appeased; to the accompaniment of wondering cries and deep howls from the men, Enrico had to turn about and bend backwards and forwards. One woman, whose curiosity outdid all the rest, even touched him so that she could measure the normality of the dimensions with her hand. Then they began to eye me, perhaps wondering if I might not be a giant in this respect, but fortunately nothing more happened, the conversation became general and excited, and the inspection was over. Luis Antonio and Solitaun joined in the talk, their excitement tinged with a certain sly amusement.

*123 The children were kept very strictly some distance away from us, although the grown-ups did not find this easy, curiosity being always strongest in the young, and especially so among primitive races where the youngsters are particularly active and intelligent and enjoy a life of perfect freedom within the bosom of the tribe. The parents kept an eye on them all the time, and if they came near us they were scolded and sent off with a sound smacking. There was every likelihood that their mothers didn't want them to come under our magic influence, which might be an evil magic all too potent against the weak and defenceless little ones. We afterwards learned that this had been a very real factor in the hostility with which we and our Guayca companions had been received, though the latter should have been known to them as friends.

The fresh morning air brought our hunger back in full force, and at last Uarema succeeded in getting hold of a piece of burned meat for us: it came from a nearby hut, and heaven only knew what it was. The charred fibres of it went down our throats like splinters of glass. Then, beyond the smoke of the first row of hammocks, I made out the roof which sheltered the chief, just as he came out with a modest throng around him. He had the gun in his hand, holding it like a bow and firing imaginary arrows by pulling at an invisible string, to the accompaniment of boom-booms that were taken up and echoed by the chorus of his followers.

I asked Luis Antonio the meaning of this pantomime. He hadn't seen what was happening and he didn't take the trouble to look, since he knew all about it already: he said the gun was looked on as a kind of bow that fired arrows with an explosion.

'So long as they don't break it!' I laughed cheerfully. But the Indian's 123* doleful look discouraged my levity.

Luis Antonio told me that the existence of guns was no secret to the [177] Samatari. They knew they were weapons, but had no idea how they worked. It all went back to a story we had heard on the Canaracuni, which had the clear ring of truth, though we had been unable to establish the date of the events.

A Brazilian expedition, possibly *garimpeiros*, or diamond seekers, had once 648 gone up the Uraricoera river in a boat with a motor. They were probably about as far up from the mouth as we were now on the Samatari river—the Aracona. These were the first civilized men ever to venture into the region, and they were well armed, as Brazilians living in forested areas generally are—in this respect differing greatly from the Venezuelans who never bother to carry more than some old gun and a stick. The four of them were going up the river with this outboard motor craft when they were hailed from the bank by a group of Indians. They brought the boat round, and as the bows touched the shore the Indians sent a well-aimed volley of arrows which struck the three Brazilians sitting for'ard. The man at the motor then fired a few shots, with what weapon I don't know, and in his turn laid low a number of Indians—four, to be exact, according to the version we heard. He then managed to swing the boat round and went back down river at full speed, eventually getting away to safety.

This was the occasion on which the Indians had got to know of guns and firearms in general, in all their terrible efficiency. But their knowledge was not to be limited to this. After a hair-raising trip the survivor reached Boa Vista, the capital of the Federal Territory of Rio Branco. There he told his tale, and authority very soon decided to take measures—and when Brazil takes such measures they are very stern. They sent out two planes, with the survivor to do the path-finding, and when they reached the approximate scene of the affray they looked for traces of Indian camps. These they bombed and machine-gunned, 'many times killing the hands and feet of the Shirianas' as we were told by the Makiritari at Canaracuni, these latter being obviously quite pleased about it. From that time onwards, guns and bombs from the air were awe-inspiring bogeys, and in this connection I found myself thinking of Usema's threats to Pancho at the Llantarigüa landing. And in our hearts we couldn't but feel grateful towards the Brazilians whose stern measures had seen to it that the voice of the clothes-wearing men had reached as far as these strange ape-men we were with now.

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Naturally it wasn't our present hosts who had attacked the Brazilians. They denied it themselves. It was other Samatari 'along that way' (a vaguely south-westward direction was indicated): very bad men they were, very savage, they were really the true, dyed-in-the-wool Kasrape—monsters who took prisoners in their battles and then split them in two on a stake driven into the earth, and afterwards made a meal of them.

Anyone who has the least idea of Indians will know how much faith to put in their tales that they themselves are so good and the other tribes 'over there' so bad: precious little. The Indians one meets are always harmless, hardworking and peaceable—according to their own account: it is the neighbouring tribe that is so bad, harrying them and laying waste their fields and robbing them and exercising their wicked magic through their medicine men, causing their children—the strength and hope of the tribe—to die of the evil eye.

You can take a region in which acts of barbarism have been committed, and make a tour right round it, and if you believe the Indians it is always the tribe further on who are the bad men responsible for the outrage. And then there are those super-bad-men, the quintessence of badness, always right outside the closed circle, the dregs of the dregs in wickedness—the super-savages, the Guaikiri. But this time, so we were led to infer by our hosts, the tribe to blame were the Kasrape who lived on the right bank of the Uraricoera, fiercest of all the outcasts and intent on chopping up every Samatari's spine to suck the marrow out.

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Luis Antonio had told me, some time during the night, that the Samatari were no longer friends of his. The Samatari and the Uarema Guayca were enemies now, the one having accused the other of the evil eye. Many Samatari babies had died lately, and if you followed out some tortuous paths of thought it apparently became clear that their deaths had been caused by the perversity of the elders of the Guayca tribe. These in their turn attributed the deaths of certain Guayca children who had been ill in recent years to the Samatari. The magic score was thus settled, but it left a remnant of hostility which had fallen upon Enrico and me. We stood in some danger between the opposing occult powers.

I learned, too, that the wretched little infant we had seen at the Mosé landing—a scion of the Uarema tribe—had died mysteriously, so the Guayca thought, owing to Samatari magic. The excursion on which he was being taken at the time when we had seen him was made with the object of taking

him outside the range of the magic influence which had reduced him to such a 123*
hideous condition. But evidently they had only escaped the Samatari magic to 754
fall straight into another, which was too much for the sick child. He died, sacrificed in a duel between two magic powers.

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The great 'provisioning-march' of the Samatari now began. We went 123*
along with them. We were prisoners, we were guests, we were tolerated 222
visitors—a bit of everything. The main body, with the women and children, 487
led the way along a track that was years old and had been opened up again the 484
day before by the younger members of the tribe, who possessed the one metal weapon used by the Samatari: a piece of a knife-blade stuck into a stick and firmly bound with bark soaked in vegetable gum. What story could this scrap of steel have told when it finally reached the headwaters of the Aracosa!

The track was by no means straight, but for all its meanderings led vaguely towards the south-east. It lay for the most part through the dense thickets of fruit-bearing trees, which probably harboured other sorts of foodstuffs of which we knew nothing. The main body arrived to find that the young men had already picked nuts and fruit of all kinds and made piles of them at the foot of the trees. All the women had to do was take them up.

When meat of any sort is found and killed on these occasions, a couple of 123*
youngsters stay behind with it. They sling a hammock and light a fire and 484
watch while it is slowly smoking on the spit. When the women come up, they [251]
pull off pieces of the flesh, put them into the rough hampers they carry on their [854]
shoulders and go on with the march, their babies jogging up and down on their backs, tied there with a strap made of bark. Some, like peripatetic vestal virgins, take fire with them, in the form of glowing brands, blowing on them as they go along lest the embers should grow cold. Thus the march of the Samatari leaves a trail of nutshells, rinds, ash, and little bits of charcoal. It suggests not so much an ordinary nomadic people on the move but rather a very special tribe composed of itinerant cooks.

With evening, or strictly speaking some time before the end of the after- [361]
noon, we found ourselves in a vast clearing where all the small plants, shrubs, [712]
bushes and grass had been cut away and swept and raked aside. All round this

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484 open space ran a belt of rattan palms with their notoriously dangerous black
712 spines. There were just two openings: a way in, and a way out. This was a
361 defence work against any enemy that might come along. An aggressor had little chance of bringing off a surprise attack against the Samatari over this open ground, and if he made a frontal attack he would find 'bread for his teeth'—that is, thorns for his feet.

[513] At night, while the Indians were all chattering heedlessly in their hammocks or sleeping the light sleep of the savage, the two gaps in the cordon were closed and the camp became a fortress difficult to storm. If they stay for several days in one place, as sometimes happens during the rainy season when they are visiting their plantations of tobacco and cane (for arrows), they will put up a palisade round the camp, on the Guayca model. This is composed of the trunks of a very tough palm, driven into the ground as close together as possible. Thus entrenched they can withstand whole days of attack from a position of strength.

123 In the course of our march, one Samatari not only devoured the larvae of
484 bees, neatly excavating them from their cells in the smoked honeycomb, but
[262] every now and then he would stop at a dead tree-trunk, seamed with ant-galleries or lanes, and run his thumb and forefinger along the groove as far as possible, pressing out the damp earthy substance, which he conveyed to his mouth like some rare bonne bouche. Smacking his lips, he carried on until he had demolished the whole network of these arboreal thoroughfares, and the ants fled away over the surface of the tree-trunk, lamenting the cataclysm that had overtaken them.

123 Even we tried this ant-hill diet, but a mixture of earth and sawdust hardly
484 appeased our hunger. Sometimes, as we crossed a stream, a few of the Samatari
261 bent down rapidly and picked out of the water some little white stones that were soft like lumps of lime. These they chewed as they went along, apparently swallowing them. They will also eat sand, the dirty, soft, vari-coloured sand which is found with the detritus of vegetable matter thrown up on the banks of a river after a flood. For on top of all this varied diet of theirs, the Samatari are also geophagists—earth-eaters. The reason for this is probably an instinctive prompting which leads them to acquire in this way the minerals their normal food—which they eat without salt or spices—does not supply.

123 Our great salvation was the fruit: meat being very precious to the savages,
262 they were so willing to give us any, and we had no means of hunting for our-
484 selves. The gun had simply disappeared. For the Samatari too, fruit is the main

source of nourishment, especially at this time of the year when every variety is 123*
ripe. We were able to experiment on ourselves and try out some of the widely 262
discussed theories of modern dietetics, which amid the general clamour set up 434
by more or less interested parties claims to be able to discover the original fount of humanity, and to arrive at the exact diet on which man in his natural state can exist.

The fruit here was of all kinds, unlimited in quantity and of every size and shape—and there it was, high up on the trees! True, there were piles of it along the path of this victualling tour, but Enrico and I weren't allowed to touch them. So I climbed, and fought off the ants. When I reached the fruit I broke off branches—the Samatari had my machete—and threw them down to Enrico, who gathered in the treasure, though not without an immediate attack on the choicest specimens 'in case they got lost' as he put it. Then I would make a hurried descent, sliding and ripping and skinning myself, to arrive on the ground covered with pestilential insects, my heart thumping with the effort. We stuffed ourselves till our cheeks were bursting, while the Samatari looked on, laughing and shouting out the name of the fruit.

Who else has ever had the chance to study the fruits of the Amazon forests, at the same time making himself the subject of experiments to determine their nutritive value? The Samatari, who are cut off from the waters of the Orinoco by thirty-two mountains, have likewise thirty-two varieties of fruit—there must be some magic in this number. The names of them all are well known and even the tiny tots learn them almost as soon as they can say 'Mama'. Every type of fruit imaginable is represented here, from nuts to acorns, from fruits as soft as tomatoes to others as dry and hard as bone, from single berries to huge bunches, and in addition to them all, a crowning delicacy of such beauty that it has more than food value alone, the white flowering heart of the palm. There are, too, a few conspicuously choice kinds, eagerly sought after by the Indians, which furnish a really substantial food and not just a few pleasant mouthfuls.

Podoimoa, olashi, husnoshi, lahu, sopah, monama and pukına—seven of the known fruits—are the ones that give you a meal, not merely refreshment, and they make magnificent eating.

Solitaan specialized in podoimoa, gathering them as he went along, without stopping. Good as they are, these chestnuts were not much sought after by the Samatari, at least at this season when there was other fruit available which they liked better. But Solitaan, who was a sensible old fellow and worldly too

But Solituma, who was a sensible old fellow and worldly

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wise, picked them and put them in a 'bag' like a big open calyx made of leaves. This chestnut is encased in a green rind, soft and spongy. He tore this off with his teeth and spat it out. The actual nut was no bigger than a billiard ball, and this he stowed away in his bag. In the evening, round a fire whose glowing ash was neatly raked to form a series of little ovens, the expatriate Samatari roasted his chestnuts, scooping them out with his bare hand when they were done. He even offered them round, if somewhat parsimoniously: the ratio was three for him and one for us.

To us, who still had our own sense of the fitness of things, it hardly seemed possible at first that humble berries and fruits of such unimpressive appearance could be of such highly nutritive value. We turned therefore to the fruit that had most eye-appeal—the ones the Indians scarcely bothered with as they went along and did not consider worth collecting for the meal at nightfall. By the Aracosa river cashew trees were plentiful, their fruits red as fire, and there was another species we hadn't seen before, orange in colour and enormous. Some of the fruits that had fallen with the weight of their ripe juice were the size of a man's fist, and to eat three or four of them gave a pleasant sense of well-being, even if it didn't last long.

The great trees must have been bearing a crop of thousands of pounds in weight, because all around the forest floor was glowing with fallen fruit and clouds of buzzing insects of every colour were busy glorifying the decay as they settled on it.

But when we had devoured our comforting quantities of these cashew fruits, some of them already over-ripe, there was a roughness on our teeth and we began to feel sick. It was now that we were ready to appreciate the wisdom of these primitive people, who left the florid purple fruits severely alone, to bury their sharp teeth in more modest-looking fare that was a good deal kinder to the human stomach.

No one can know the thrill of excitement that comes to the Samatari—and other Indians too—when they find themselves underneath a big *helpess* tree that brushes the waters of some little stream with the mass of its seed pods, long and round like those of the senna tree. Many such pods are used exactly like the ordinary French or kidney beans, but for this particular delicacy it is neither the bean nor the pod itself that is eaten, but the white tender pulp in which the beans are set. We ourselves found it far too sweet and sickly. But in spite of all the excitement here, we had still not come to the fruit which was thought

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worthy of being packed up and carried with us. For this purpose, *kekpaa* beans were too bulky and the white pulp over-delicate and inclined to go rotten too soon.

The *momona* and its little brother the *pahma* are the fruits that really rouse the collector's instinct in the Samatari, and they rely on these for a good part of the whole tribe's food supplies. The first time we saw them they seemed to us like olives, green when immature, brown when ripe, the rarer *pahma* being also the darker in colour. It was difficult for us to distinguish the trees that bore this fruit among all the rest, but the Samatari possess a more highly trained eye for this, and always stopped and skipped about, staring upwards through a mass of leaves that all looked alike to us. Sometimes fallen fruit on the ground gave them a clue, and they fell on it with excited cries to see how ripe it was, or, as it often proved, how worm-eaten. The youngest would be already up the tree—not the one in question, as a rule, but a neighbouring one easier to climb, from the top of which he would more easily be able to get at the fruiting branches.

Sempronio walked in silence. He was still haunted by fear. It had come as a shock to the Samatari (though they made a few jokes about it) when they learned that he was not a Guayca but a Shirian from the Casaracuni. The Valley of the Moon, to them, was the very heart of enemy territory, and had it not been for the protective magic invested in our two beards, they might easily have put him to death. After this came out, they had put him to work. The boy was pleased because this meant that he could eat. He helped them gather the food supplies, and by the time it came to eating them, he was friends with everybody and everybody was friends with him.

No Samatari could see Sempronio's smile and resist it. He displayed a prodigious agility up in the trees, even winning the admiration of those who might well have been his executioners. The *momona* soon began tumbling down and the human monkeys scrambled to collect it. None was eaten. This berry matures slowly, giving strength to the men and abundant milk to the women. Actually this is the berry of one of the Lauraceae, and has something of the tartness, the bitterness, of that aromatic shrub so reminiscent of the Mediterranean lands. But the pulp is rich and oily and sweet as butter. After a few minutes over the fire it is not only cooked through, but mashed as well; and if you are hungry during the day's march it can be eaten without being cooked at all if you hold it in your mouth for ten minutes or so, when the warmth and saliva will render it deliciously tender.

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262 684 There were often piles of *hamudi* heaped up underneath trees much too big and too tall for me to have climbed, even had I been dying of hunger. The *hamudi* is a queer, oval-shaped nut with a big, woody husk enclosed in a compact mass of tiny, needle-sharp spines that resemble the crystals of certain mineral forms of asbestos. It takes some opening, but once open offers man the rich enjoyment of a soft white nut running with a creamy milk.

The consumption of these nuts sets a real problem in logistics and psychology. Transport over any distance is hampered by the exorbitant weight of the shells, a weight which the Indians with their extremely practical minds consider to be out of proportion to the food value of the nut, high though this is. But once the nuts are shelled, there are the piles of gleaming white grains, so attractive that no one can resist them and they are devoured without a thought for the mothers' milk or the strength of the children's blood. Without a doubt, this matter of the *hamudi* represents one of the outstanding problems of the Samatari provisioning-march and still awaits a satisfactory solution.

VII

262 [721] The difference in taste between the two races—Shirians and bearded men—comes out most emphatically in their appreciation of the various fruits. There is one particular kind which the Shirians adore—in fact, deify: they will even go to war over the picking of it and those who fall on the battlefield are deemed martyrs and saints.

262 272 For the Shirians, Saint Carpoforo lives incarnate in the miraculous, the almost mythical *lahue*; while we, the bearded ones, would sooner identify him with the *sapah*, which is a blend of fig, strawberry and mulberry. The *lahue* grows on the Corozo palm, one of the tallest of the palm trees, which is covered with long and terrible thorns that keep the monkeys far away from its forbidden fruit. Beneath the thorns there is a sweet liquid—palm wine. It can be obtained by lighting a fire at the base of the tree, so that all the juices collect together towards the top of the palm, near the growing part. The tree is then felled, and a little skilful surgery will drain the liquid, which ferments readily. [273] But the Samatari do not indulge in this practice: some deep and ancient wisdom, though they are scarcely conscious of it, has given them the simplest possible commandment about drinking: thou shalt drink only water. Nor does

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the usefulness of the Corozo palm end here: it furnishes a hard, black wood 824
that gives the Indians their finest bows, real masterpieces treasured with pride 411
by their owners and only bought and sold with a great deal of ceremony.

The *lahas* represents the Indian food-ideal. It grows in bunches up to eighty 262
pounds or more in weight, each fruit being the size of an egg and in shape and
colour not unlike a small, ripe cheese. Cooking it takes a long time. The out- [252]
side is a thick starchy layer, orange-coloured and rich-tasting without being over-sweet or sickly. It is better than any of our starchy foods such as bread or potatoes or chestnuts or *gnocchi*. The whole of it is edible right down to the little stone itself. This is a kind of delicious almond which crumbles pleasantly under one's teeth and leaves nothing but an insatiable desire for more—hence its name, *lahas*.

Lahas can be carried: there are no doubts about this, as in the case of the kuamoshi. Its golden bunches are big enough to cover up a man, and the carrier protects himself from the thorns on the branches with a good thick cushion of leaves. In the evening they are cooked, so that the grim-faced women of the tribe are able to produce their milk after all and tirelessly pass it on to the scabby, drooling mouths of their infants, who in their turn convert it into blood and yield it up to the clouds of flies and mosquitoes which wrap them round with a perpetual dark veil like an aura of evil and accursed spirits.

In recompense for its fabulous generosity, the *lahas* tree has been accorded one great privilege that sets it apart from all the other fruit-bearing trees of the
forest: it is never cut down for the easier harvesting of the crop. The fruit is [222]
brought down by some clever manipulation of a long pole, for no climber's hands and feet could withstand the thorns. If in very special circumstances the tree has to be cut down, then its upper stem is opened so that its last, secret riches can be cut out—the ten pounds of sweet, crisp, chestnut-flavoured tenderness that is its growing point, the heart. Then the tree will weep out its tears from its torn breast, tears of wine that are lost.

Certainly the tribes living nearest to the forest and the forest's deep anti- 262
human mysteries have chosen the *lahas* as their god of food: but we, a hybrid 484
mixture of natural fears and supernatural thunderings, chose to set up opposite it our own saint, the yellow and most luscious *sepeh*. When the marching horde reached a gnarled tree which evoked the quick cry '*Sepeh!*' they flung themselves at it—such is their agility in tree-climbing that they literally seem to fling themselves up—and began a feast that reduced them to silence because

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484 they were eating so fast. The weighty mass of the fruit soon began to distend their stomachs and later on the little seeds began to settle and give rise to belching noises which had to be heard to be believed. But for all that, it was apparent that they did not take the *sopah* altogether seriously and were not able to accept the primacy which we were only too ready to award it, in the same way as some religions, while recognizing the prophets of another, will consider them inferior to their own.

This was the Samatari's attitude over the *sopah*. They held it in a very mild contempt—and it is worth noting that this contempt sprang from sources too prejudiced to be quite sincere. It is the womenfolk who put a smoke-screen round the *sopah* tree and divert their men's attention towards the *monama* and its satellites. The women cannot climb the *sopah* trees burdened with their babies on their backs, and if they left them on the ground they would be eaten alive by ants. For the women, too, there is always the risk of leaving their pendulous breasts on the thorns. Thus they are never exactly on the spot when the *sopah* fruits are being gathered and can never eat their fill because their men consider the *sopah* a divinity whose tender fleshly form cannot survive if transported. The women, therefore, mere starving gleaners on the ground, have to be content with the fallen fruit, usually the unripe and worm-eaten specimens which their menfolk have rejected. Hence their stubborn propaganda against what we considered the finest fruit in the forest.

262 The *sopah*, like all especially good things, has a flavour that cannot easily be defined: it has all the good points of other fruits, and none of the disadvantages. It is like a fig, but better than a fig—there is no skin. It is like a mulberry, but sweeter. Its flavour outdoes the strawberry, which in shape it somewhat resembles. It offers perfection to the taste-buds, a luscious, fleshly perfection which properly belongs to the sphere of the erotic.

We saw ourselves dwelling for a long, long time in these gardens of sopah and lahas, far from the arrows of the Samatari and the guns of civilized men. But this was just an empty dream. Because without an Indian to help us gather them, when we wearied of losing our blood on the trees, we should come down to eating the windfalls crawling with worms, while the monkeys made fun of us, pelting us with the sopah stones—vain relics of our chosen saint.

5

At Home with the Samatari

I

123 * SOON we had some friends among the Samatari: a group of young boys who behaved as though they were members of our private levy. They were also a privileged band within the tribe itself, because they had made themselves loincloths out of scraps of our shirts—abandoned by our original despoilers. They were with us at all times except during the actual marching periods, which did not last too long. They hung their hammocks near ours—indeed, we had at first taken them to be our guards. But their attitude very soon became clear: they were our friends and admirers. Young and full of life, they saw in us the representatives of an unknown world, the wide world of their yearnings.

With their appearance on the scene, the worst of our hunger was over. True, there was always a chronic desire for something to eat gnawing at us, deep down, probably owing to the poor quality of the diet, the excessive proportion of fruit and the lack of meat (which came only rarely and then was either half-raw or burned)—but this unacknowledged hunger was an old acquaintance of ours in forest conditions: it even plagues the explorer with ample provisions and the means of cooking them to his liking. With nightfall, the boys put a fire—'the blanket of the night'—under our hammocks. It consisted mostly of slow-burning termite nests, where the fat ants fried slowly, wreathing the air with a heavy smell which we got used to after a time.

123 * 484 The provisioning march continued along the banks of the Aracosa, through a forest region of huge, closely packed trees where the going was drier and cleaner than it had been before. Fruit trees were plentiful and the nomadic horde of Samatari went along in high glee. We were now reunited with all our old friends, from Uarema to Sempronio, who moved about as freely among these unpredictable hosts of ours as they would have done at home on the Merevari.

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123 At one point, Luis Antonio got the gun back. The cartridges, in some unknown fashion, had got lost, except for a dozen which bore every appearance of having been soaked and chewed. But we might still be able to fire a shot or two, 'on our way back'. Unfortunately, though we were looking forward to it as our day of salvation, that time seemed to grow more distant with every day that passed. We were on our way south now, and the forest of the Uagna where our canoe was waiting for us seemed a mere memory of another world.

Only later did I come to know what had happened about the gun. The Samatari could not get used to the idea of having a fire-arm with them. Partly because they knew it was dangerous, and were afraid that one day it might automatically turn on them, partly because they thought that if their enemies got hold of such a weapon they would be able to attack them and wipe them out. Luis Antonio had helped them out of their dilemma, cleverly inducing them to give up the gun by a manœuvre which didn't enhance our prestige, but improved our position considerably by establishing the fact that we weren't really dangerous at all. Luis Antonio had given a demonstration of the gun's powers—at a time when Enrico and I were too far away to hear the shot. He had chosen for his target a termites' nest hanging down from a tree and fired some spread-shot at it. As might have been expected, nothing happened—apart from the fact that all the Samatari took flight. A few leaves fluttered down, the spectators returned, and everyone was disappointed. The *bombamalé* was no good at all! They had expected to see the whole tree, not just the termites' nest, destroyed—they had the same faith in the unlimited powers of the gun as the Makiritari had in the outboard motor. From that moment on they left the gun to Luis Antonio and didn't bother any more about it, though they may have wondered, being naturally suspicious of Guayca tricks, whether Luis Antonio had left out of the weapon something that he ought to have put in. But very likely they had connected the idea of the gun with the air bombardment of the Kasrape, and in this case they must have been even more mystified still.

II

411 Samatari weapons are much more efficient than our guns, in their own hands, at any rate, and they have one advantage: the raw material for them is

there for the taking in the forest and the supply, from both animal and vegetable sources, is inexhaustible. 411

The bow is of surprising dimensions. It is six feet six inches long, this being 411
equivalent, considering the height of the archer, to nine feet nine inches for us. 824
The simplest pattern is made from the *seke* palm. They also use a hardwood—from a tree known in Venezuela as the 'golden pole'. This is very rare, almost as rare among the Indians as metal. But the finest bows of all, possessed by the few and worth a fortune, are made from the corozo tree, the *lakse* of the Shirians. This wood is extremely hard but very fibrous, with the elasticity of a steel spring. The shaping and fining down of these bows, and the making of the arrows, is the one form of craftsmanship known to the Samatari. With this they occupy themselves during the rainy season, under rough roofs of palm leaves. A tree belonging to the Moraceae family furnishes the very tough fibre [283]
for the bowstrings: it is found all along the river-banks and in the forest glades.

The slender arrows, six foot six inches long, are made from a cane cultivated in the secret depths of the forest, though it grows naturally on any of the river creeks which flood regularly. Curassow or guan feathers, split in half, are [237]
bound on to the cane.

There are three types of arrow-head, according to the purpose for which 411
they are to be used. The lightest is a splinter cut from the shinbone of a monkey, [237]
firmly fixed to the end of a short stick, in such a way as to form a sharp-pointed prong. This is used on small animals, and especially for birds and fish. There are [226]
numbers of big fish, like the *pampano* and *surapiri*, which lie near the surface so that a slight rippling of the water betrays their presence. The arrow which pierces them cannot be shaken out, and its length and weight make it difficult for the wounded fish to get very far.

Another kind of point is virtually a miniature spear fashioned out of a very 411
hard bamboo cane. Very sharp, and razor-edged, it will strike deep into the 726
most resistant flesh, the toughest hide. The Samatari use this on the bigger game, such as tapir, and also for war—though for the latter purpose it is superseded by a specialized warhead. This is a sharpened splinter of palm wood—the same as goes to the making of the bows—dipped in a red poison made from the bark of a certain tree. A series of rings, four or five of them, are notched out round the arrow-tip, so that it is weakened at these places. If the tip strikes bone on entering the body, or if the arrow is pulled out, it snaps at one of these weakened parts, leaving the broken tip embedded in the flesh so that

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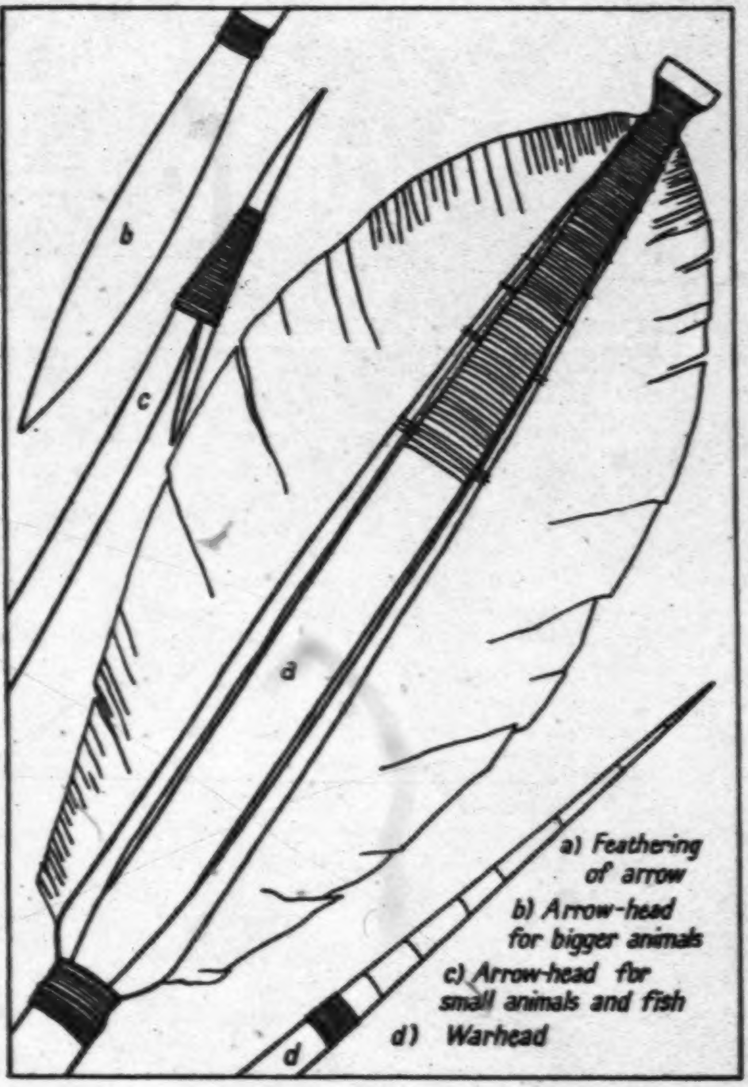

a) Feathering of arrow
b) Arrow-head for bigger animals
c) Arrow-head for small animals and fish
d) Warhead

the poison has time to spread and enter the bloodstream. The Samatari go off to 411
war with masses of these poisoned arrows and a cane quiver slung across their 726
shoulders. This contains spare arrow-heads which can be quickly attached to
the arrows arriving in a stream from the enemy. Every fighter carries his own [422]
ammunition, but the weapons are really the common property of friend and
foe alike.

There is one other widely used weapon, and a deadly one it is—a heavy wooden club for use on the cranium in close-combat conditions, such as usually arise at the end of the battle when the ammunition is exhausted and the antagonists have worked themselves up into a fine frenzy. Then the hand-to-hand fighting excels in ferocity, but the blood scattered on the ground is misleading—the actual mortality rate is very low. Tremendous whacks on the head are exchanged, that lay the scalp open right down to the bone. But cracking the cranium itself is not so easy: Samatari heads are harder than Coroto palm.

One may well ask why the Indians are forever fighting these wars, but this 721
is to put the question a little too ingenuously. The answer can only be that it is 628
their mode of life—just as it is other people's mode of life not to keep on
fighting. There are vendettas as old as their race itself, fanned by their belief in [754]
the evil eye of the witch doctors who can cause the death of children and spread
sickness through the tribe. Fear is the underlying cause, at the origin of these [753]
vendettas and at the origin of all origins; fear that is the very condition, the
very breath of existence for primitive man in the inhuman, unhuman forest
regions that set their stamp on all who live in them. Fear gives birth to these
bloody encounters, which a little cool-headedness could transform into the
meeting of friends. We ourselves owed our salvation to the fact that we hadn't [123] *
fought back. We had a certain confidence too, over and above the passing
moment of fear, a certain faith in the essential goodness of man.

But apart from fear and the vendettas which grow out of it, there is one 721
native activity which just as easily leads to war: theft. Theft is the activity in 685
which the Shirians excel, their way of living. Everything that can further their nomadic existence is torn out of the earth, the trees and the animals. The process means effort and struggle, always more or less exhausting and unsafe. It follows logically that if anything they basically need belongs to other men, they will take it from them, too. The tribe on the river so-and-so possesses a machete, or a knife—perhaps the result of long bargaining with their neighbours, or, more often, of a highly successful bit of burglary and some

721 [685] skirmishing. After several days' howling and shrieking, an expedition is decided on. It is not certain that a battle will yield the desired utensil or object, but then, it is never certain that a hunt will fill the pot, and many a tree looks promising and then turns out to be barren, or to have no ripe fruit. But a good, just war, the Samatari think—and all their wars are just—always produces something worth fighting for, even if the immediate result isn't one that would [754] strike the impartial observer as advantageous. For even if the encounter produces only negative results, the enemy will henceforth go in fear and it will be a long time before their witch-doctors or magic-men dare to strike at the children again with their black arts of death.

And in addition to all these lines of reasoning, savages cannot grasp, as we can, the notion of victory or defeat, for this means first differentiating war from ordinary normal modes of life and treating it as a special occasion with its own scale of values. For the Indians, war is just one of the facts of life, like the harvest. Its result has no direct value, in so far as that result can always be changed by another war, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

III

*123 When we were not on the march I attended to the sick—an activity which soon grew to such dimensions that I found myself in charge of a full-scale open-air clinic, with a meek queue of patients waiting their turn to see the doctor, and an orderly to help me. The start of it all was the mournful bent old man who came along to us morning, noon and night, pointing to his kidneys and wailing '*Ninl, ninl*'—'Bad, bad.' We had fortunately succeeded in getting back the three or four tins containing our medical supplies, which included a good deal of terramycin presented to us by the manufacturers in exchange for the samples of earth we were to bring back. I imagined that in the case of people like the Samatari, who were completely unaccustomed to any drug at all, an antibiotic should have a very positive effect. In fact, the old fellow definitely improved after taking a few capsules. He was far less bent as he walked and no longer complained that he felt '*ninl*'.

This must have been an excellent advertisement for us, because a great many patients began to come forward—most of them not showing any sign of suffering from anything at all. Then they began to understand that we treated wounds

with disinfectant, and from that time on examined their bodies carefully for 123*
the slightest little scratch. I daubed on a little red methylate, which thrilled [822]
them, as anything red does, and when I threw away the piece of cottonwool I had been using there was a regular fight for it, the winner using it to paint himself as he fancied.

But once I had started using the terramycin for the old man's benefit, an 123*
unforeseen problem arose. When I displayed the tablet, this panacea for all ills, 753
the patient (backed by all the crowd of onlookers) would make me a sign to swallow it myself, and then give another to him. In the beginning I thought that this indicated a lack of faith in the benign effect of the medicine, and some fear of poison. But I afterwards learned that it was something quite different, arising out of their peculiar conception of illness, which to them was virtually magic. Sickness was an evil something which got into a man's body and then did all its bad things. So it had to be chased out, by fair means or foul. You could frighten it away, as the magic-men did with their nocturnal exorcisms; or, by putting some substance in the body which irked it, you could make it take itself off. This was what the men-that-wear-clothes did. Either way set the sufferer free from the evil thing.

But if you chase a mouse from under one piece of furniture, it will run under another. In the same way, this evil thing, chased out of the sufferer's body, will straightway take refuge in the body of the man effecting the cure! Therefore the medicament must be ready in two equal doses, to protect both doctor and patient. I must have had to swallow untold numbers of tablets of that nauseating terramycin when treating the Samarati! Fortunately, I could always go a little way off on my own, with a call of nature as an excuse, and insert a finger in my throat to make myself vomit.

Indians as a rule present few cases of sickness: the process of natural selection 164
has been at work among them from their infancy, destroying the weak and the handicapped and leaving the better endowed to survive. They do, however, suffer a good deal from intestinal infections; stomach parasites are present owing to the eating of rotten or windfall fruit; and there are various skin diseases due to a fungus growth of the type the Brazilians call 'bicho geographico' because of the resemblance of the infected part to a map. Mange, and sores of various kinds, complete the range of skin troubles.

But there remains that queen of epidemics, which I have not mentioned till now—tuberculosis. Its victims are of all ages. Living naked, night and day, with a torrid sun or the cold dankness of the forest after dark, the Indians are especially subject to respiratory troubles, bronchitis and chronic catarrh being common. It must be a short step from these to tuberculosis, to judge by the widespread incidence of the latter, though it is worth recording that among the Samatari themselves the disease does not appear to have reached the same alarming proportions as among the Taurepàn of the Eastern uplands, where it [192] is a real scourge. Their name for it is an onomatapoeic one—*toctoemòh*—suggesting the coughing and catarrhal effects of any malady of the respiratory system, to which the word is applied.

[784] [721] They are more afraid of tuberculosis than of any war, or any surprise attack at night. Tribes infected with *toctoemòh* become taboo, and by the same token immune from attack, because their enemies are more afraid of their tuberculosis than their arrows. I was told this by Uarema, who said that some time ago a party of their enemies (of unspecified origin) set out to attack them. They had already been several days on the march when they learned that the Guayca were suffering from a bad epidemic of colds and catarrh. They gave up their idea of attacking them, and returned to their own lands.

952 164 Wounds infected by insects can be quickly cured, the reason being that with these primitive Indians the defence-mechanism is vigorous and reacts immediately when assisted by antibiotics or sulphonamides. In this connection I have often determined by experiment the relative healthiness of the forest compared with the unhealthiness of the grasslands or savannah lying open to the sun. In the forest, damp and mouldering like some subterranean world, wounds rarely * become infected, even if they are not kept clean.

123 164 752 I once fell down on a clay hillside, in the Upper Cuyuni country, with a machete in my hand. It was pouring with rain and everything was covered with mud and very slippery. The machete stuck into the ground as I fell forward, and my hand—as happens in the case of a fall like this—automatically tightened on the tool to help me regain my balance and slid along the blade, which was always kept razor-sharp. I had three fingers cut open right through the middle joint, the muscles and tendons being severed. We had nothing with us, not even a clean handkerchief. I at once closed my hand and bound up the fist with a bit of old rag. We then spent some days making our way down to the base-camp where we had our medicines and disinfectants. There I opened my fist, to find the cuts miraculously closed up, without the slightest sign of any infection. A

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few days later my hand was completely healed, even though the tendons had been severed and the fingers partially paralysed. 164 752

Some antibiotic substance must surely be produced in great quantities in the soil of the dank forest regions: while in the grasslands the cycle of growth is altered owing to the effect of the sun's direct rays, which either destroy the culture or impede its development.

164 The most dangerous diseases are those which attack the young children and are naturally reflected in their mothers, too. Intestinal worms are the scourge of primitive populations and I have constantly observed that while among the Makiritari they affect the grown men as well, among the more primitive Shirians they are limited exclusively to the women and children, whose bellies are often swollen to an enormous size. Many of the children die at an early age from this, and from colics, intestinal obstruction, and suffocation.

165 Indians don't live long, even if they manage to survive the dangers that beset them in their early years. Like all primitive races, they develop precociously—the girls reaching womanhood at ten—and old age descends quickly upon them, their bodies being worn out by hard work, exposure to the extremes of weather, and anchylosis. Ancients are few and far between in any tribe: not more than one or two among some scores of men and women. The Indians whom we usually call old are not, in most cases, much more than forty.

In spite of this I have always believed in the existence of some super-ancient, some Methuselah of the Forest, an altogether exceptional individual whose organism has battled with and overcome every ill, achieving a high degree of immunity and resistance, and living on indefinitely. Certain experiences of mine with tribes of various races have led me to this conclusion.

IV

123* [133] The Aracosa is a river of white water flowing over a bed of large granite stones. Near its mouth are huge falls where it pours over a solid sandstone shelf on its way to join the even clearer waters of the Uararicoera, a little above the confluence of its sister stream the Quadu.

After a descent lasting several days, we were in camp on this sandstone shelf, with the roar of the falls in our ears, enjoying a feast of sunshine that everyone seemed to appreciate. Our chief preoccupations were the louse and the 100

• Our chief occupations were the louse and the

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[136] flea—the penetrating variety, *Afroamericana nigua*, which keeps everybody's feet busy in the equatorial zones of our globe every bit as effectively as the dances that originate there. Americana is not such a bad animal as his African brother, the jigger, though he is more plentiful. Indian feet are full of him, and the open craters in the horny, almost bony patches forming the ball of the foot are evidence of the constant care they take to keep open the little insects' snug lairs and prevent him from taking up permanent residence.

The eradication of lice is carried out at a family or social gathering in a spirit of mutual aid. Men and women will all sit round together in a circle making a thorough inspection of one another's thick hair till they come upon the black louse crouching there silently, like a peccary surprised in the forest, among [262] the roots of the hairs. He is taken between two fingers and disposed of in the simplest fashion: he is eaten. The same privilege is accorded to the eggs, which like all eggs must taste delicious. The nigua can be dealt with by oneself but [142] female collaboration is nevertheless appreciated. A soft, gentle hand—Samatari ladies have exceedingly small hands and feet—introduces a pin (presented by us) or a splinter of Corozo palm (presented by the forest) into the little nest. The white grub of this accursed insect then emerges into the light of day, but the fate reserved for it is not a human end. It is thrown to the fish, which come along in shoals for the fat tit-bit.

* 123 We had no soap, and during these halts the best we could do was to splash water over ourselves. The Samatari were not interested in following our example: rain gave them the only baths they ever took. We couldn't even swim to get clean, as we had done in the 'black water' rivers higher up, because there was danger lurking here beneath the harmless-looking surface.

136 The perils of tropical rivers are five in number—five major perils, that is, because the minor ones, like the amoeba and other parasites, may loom large among the fads and fancies of medical men but do not form part of the psychological baggage of the explorer.

The cayman is king of these perils. His reign is uncontested. His body may be anything up to thirteen feet long, solid and impregnable as a crest of rock. Almost equal in rank is peril number two—the anaconda or water-serpent: if the cayman is king, the anaconda is certainly queen. She is a wonderful monster, up to ten yards in length, with all the force of a hurricane. And being a reptile, the anaconda has all the virtues of the reptiles, enhanced by her aquatic habits, which make her cleaner and nobler than them all.

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The poisonous ray with the sting in its tail lies crouched on the bottom, scarcely distinguishable in colour from the sand. The incautious man who puts his foot on it is immediately stung and suffers the most acute pain he has ever felt. In this connection, we may mention an interesting cure which the natives of Guiana resort to for ray-stings. They poultice the affected region with a compress soaked in water used for washing the intimate parts of a woman during her menstrual period. This cure has yet to be verified scientifically, but we hope matters will remain as they are. Why should the people be deprived of a remedy at once so cheap, so exotic—and so successful?

That freshwater electric eel, *gimnoto americano*, awaits its prey in the hopes of transmitting some of its excess electricity, which accumulates in its belly-batteries, charged during its periods of rest by the current passing from the anode of the rocky bottom to its own cathode. It is a short, thick eel with an ugly expression as though it had a set of false teeth, probably due to its compressed energy, a nervous force denied an outlet, and also undeniably caused by the glaring injustice of Man. For Man has raised monuments to Volta and Faraday which would more fittingly have honoured the electric eel.

Last—and most frequent—of the five classic perils, is that carnivorous fish known in Brazil as the *piraña* and in Venezuela as the *caribe*. In seething, antlike swarms it will lie impatiently waiting for its bloody prey: and while waiting, just to keep in training, it will devour its own kind. Carnivorous fish are not all of the same species: actually almost all freshwater fish in the tropics are carnivorous, even the most innocent of them, and I recall now that the best way to clean up certain wound or infected places is to dip the part into a shallow stretch of river water. Crowds of the most sympathetic little fish will come along sniffing and nibbling, and they will clean up the wound in such a way as to strike envy into any surgeon's heart. But there are also fish that will nip off a finger, or any soft part, at one fell swoop—as often happens to the diamond workers when they dive into deep pockets in search of diamonds.

Generally speaking, the five perils we have mentioned, evil genii of the plain, are not met with in waters at a higher altitude. These they cannot reach because of the rapids which bar the way, and they would be unable to survive there in any case, the water being too cold for them. Only the king of them all, the cayman, permits himself to send his more modest envoys up into the higher regions—alligators of tranquil character and appetizing flesh. And the anaconda will, from time to time, allow her little ones, who are eager to get to

136 know the world, a few excursions into those terrible waters where the very absence of peril means, for these lowland monsters, the greatest peril of all.

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*123 The Samatari had now got quite used to having us in their midst and their primitive fear of us—the emotion which gives rise to an instinctive urge to [609] kill—had disappeared utterly. The fear strangers evoke in them is twofold: they are afraid of being killed, and of having their womenfolk raped. We hadn't killed anybody, and the women did not attract us. We left them in peace, even when they were driven by their insatiable professional curiosity to inspect our private parts.

From being merely tolerated, therefore, we soon passed quite naturally to the stage of having a rather more positive value placed upon us. Soon we were superior beings who had chosen their tribe as the privileged recipients of our friendship. This was without a doubt an auspicious sign for them, and one they must profit by. For the moment the profit which the medicine-man had in mind related only to matters appertaining to magic and moral spheres and had nothing to do with our persons. We ourselves, indeed, were not called upon to play an active part.

*123 756 789 782 Ceremonies of propitiation were enacted at night. The medicine-man would sit in his hammock with his feet dangling over the fire, invoking prosperity for his own people and ruin and death for their enemies (who were doing the same thing, in the same spirit, at the same moment, in some other corner of the forest). But the Samatari had us with them: the effect of their invocations would travel far and fast, like the explosion of the *bombemadé*.

*123 533 756 789 The medicine-man would suddenly sit up in his hammock as if he was cold, and after burbling something incomprehensible, slowly shout out the name of a fruit—for instance, *monama*. The last syllable was held for some time, with modulations that reminded me of an echo rebounding from hill to hill. When this solo was over the men's chorus—they were all sitting round the fire in their hammocks, too—would take up the refrain, reciting a long litany full of mournful verses. According to the brief explanations given by Luis Antonio, the gist of it was: much *monama* for the Samatari and none for their enemies. Let hunger strike them down. They are bad men. A moment's silence would

follow. Then, in the same fashion, the medicine-man would announce the 123*
name of another fruit, let us say *olashi*. The chorus would repeat the same 533
formula. And so on, through all the thirty-two fruits of the forest, the litany 756
was sung. Then it was the animals' turn—those that provided meat. From the 789
noble tapir right down to the worm: might he pass serenely from his muddy lair
into the tomb of the Samatari stomach.

When the victualling business had thus been settled, the time was ripe for 123*
more general songs and prayers. One little song that turned up I had already 533
heard among the Guayca and other Shirians. The tune was easily recognizable,
catchy, even; but the words were strange, and probably not understood by the
singers themselves. Then came isolated songs, and broken snatches of tunes
that went on all night till the first gleam of dawn, when the priest and his flock
gradually dropped off to sleep. The ceremony was over.

It might appear from a hasty glance at their ceremonies of propitiation and 123*
exorcism that the Shirians believe in the supernatural, but this is not so. 771

We often questioned Uarema on the subject, but his reply was always in
the negative, and he laughed at the Makiritari's Canaima and the other tribes'
Maguaritòn. 'We don't believe in those stories,' he answered, invariably, in his
picaroon Spanish. The Shirians do not believe in supernatural beings such as [771]
gods, devils and their intermediaries. Certain ceremonies of theirs, it is true,
are addressed to powers which we should not consider as belonging to the
material world, but to the Shirian mind they do belong to this world, like other
evident natural forces.

For instance, the medicine-man's cures for the sick possess a value and a [756]
methodology corresponding to medicine as we practise it. The sickness—the [755]
bad thing—is clearly visible. The medicine-man is a man with a powerful voice,
which frightens the bad thing as it might frighten a man. The bad thing is forced
to take flight, leaving the sufferer free. Magic, as we conceive it, is not involved.

Another example will emphasize the Shirian viewpoint even better. When 771
the Shirians are shooting the rapids, anyone on board without a definite job,
such as steering or paddling, will make a gesture with his hand to keep the 789
swirling waters well away. For us, such a gesture would imply some sort of
superstitious idea, for there is no physical connection between the hand that is
trying to ward off the water and the water itself. But to the Indians it is rather
an example of a purely physical phenomenon arising out of the man's will-power and his determination that the boat shall not be swamped, which his

771 789 gesture adequately expresses. The point is that the primitive has not yet clarified his ideas on the exact relationship between cause and effect, between the wish and its realization—which is to say, between will and reality, subjective and objective. Another clear proof of this lies in the attitude towards pregnancy and childbirth, which we had already noticed among Uarema's people.

789 831 Even the belief in amulets is one aspect of the complete naturalness of the supernatural! Shirian amulets are made from the dust of a dried leaf or piece of wood, wrapped into a tiny parcel inside a banana leaf, and tied round the arm. [832] Some of these have the power to attract love, if not quite in the same sense as the love philtres of Medieval Europe. It should be borne in mind that what we call love—for us, the cultural refinement of a physical attraction—does not exist for the Indians. For them, nothing is involved but the physiological relationship, together with the satisfaction of fulfilling an individual need, a sharing of erotic excitement and as a result, the future increase of their stock. Thus the phenomenon of 'falling in love' is not present: it is simply the taking of a man, or a woman. There is no courtship, only the act itself. In the light of this it becomes clear that what the Indian hopes for from the amulet is not success in wooing a man or a woman already known and selected, but a happy outcome of all things sexual, upon which so much depends—the woman, the family and the continuance of his race.

789 757 The amulet is not a 'charm' such as we imagine it: it consists simply of a substance which possesses the required power by virtue of its own nature—not by virtue of our belief in it—in exactly the same way as some vegetable extracts have the power to produce diarrhoea, and others the power to stop it. As a cure for diarrhoea the Indians take something prepared from a liana, which puts a stop to the trouble and restores the system to its normal state. The virtue of this substance and the way in which it acts is no more and no less occult than in the case of the amulet worn to attract success in love. The curative pill disappears into the mouth and its effects are felt elsewhere. The relation between the two regions is no more and no less mysterious than in the case of the love amulet: the human body is just as real, just as complex and just as unknown as the external world and other human beings.

756 793 The medicine-man is to be found in all Shirian tribes. He is the witch-doctor and the physician for all general purposes. His superior is the *lahalla*, a kind of high priest, and a very, very rare bird, who possesses wonder-working powers of an unheard-of degree of effectiveness. Uarema assured me that the *lahalla* at

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Pulipuli—the only one then known to exist—could pick out an assassin from a 793
group of ten men gathered for his ceremonies of exorcism. After a few passes
made by the wizard, the guilty man lost his hair at one fell swoop, and was [789]
thus unmasked.

Endowed as I was with unimaginable powers, I became the *lahalla*. I was 123*
called 'Lahallatuan'. My watch, by the aid of which I could see the passing of 793
the hours, predict the weather, foretell the course of journeys and cure certain ills (by applying it to the affected part) had also been promoted. No longer was it mere medicine-man's magic, but lahalla's magic.

VI

We were now an integral part of the Samatari tribe and in certain respects 123*
their moral leaders. The chief, glorying in his (our) red drawers, gave us the benefit of strange daily discourses in which he seemed to be inviting us to take
part in his counsels and share in the planning of tribal activities. I had begun [122]
to learn the language, which had already interested me in the Casaracuni days, and was able to reply with a few more or less appropriate words, hoping that they would fit in with what I imagined he was talking about. My efforts were generally crowned with success and everyone shouted with glee at the sight of a white man speaking Shirian.

The world the Indians know, within the limits of their primitive conception, is a boundless forest criss-crossed by rivers and water-courses flowing in every direction. The final destination of these streams is not understood, or even thought of. In the centre of this forest is the tribe itself. Over there are other Indians, known only to few and spoken of from time to time. Somewhere in the same forest there are Indians with beards and clothes, outboard motors and guns—terrible Indians, tall in stature and always bad, angry men: such is the first impression occidentals make on these more apathetic wild peoples. The two of us, envoys of these distant Indians, had shown that we were not such bad men, and not in such a perpetual rage. In all humility and simplicity, we had become part and parcel of the Samatari themselves, and they on their side did not lack a real and disinterested friendliness towards us, as witness the behaviour of the boys, our admirers, who never lost a chance of overwhelming us with their kindness. That I should speak their language was the most wonderful

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123 (194) thing they could ever have imagined. It was the first time a stranger had learned
to articulate the explosive vocables of their savage, noisy tribe.

197 Unlike Makiritari and Pemontón, languages of Carib origin with very
194 frequent aspirates, the Shirian tongue is chanted rather than spoken and possesses
* 123 few aspirates. In all probability it is close to the fountain-head of all language—
that is, a common-sense arrangement of sounds and chants—and it is more
adapted to forest conditions, being 'howled', with the accent on the last
* syllable of the word, so that the sound echoes over a considerable distance.

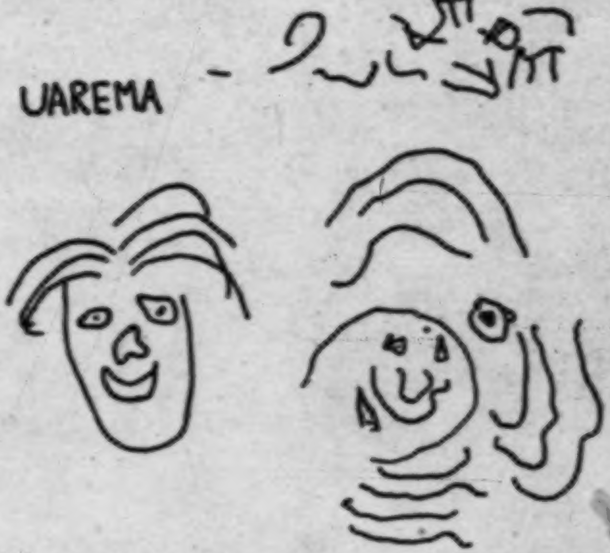
123 The language is richer than might be supposed from the backwardness of
197 the Indians who speak it. Later on, with Luis Antonio's help, I was able to
192 complete a vocabulary of more than eight hundred words. The most surprising
[126] feature is that many of the words have an undeniable affinity with the Malayan
language. One example is '*tuan*', the word (indifferently prefixed or suffixed)
by which the Shirian refers to a man as such, differentiated from other forms
of life or other things, and therefore implying a certain superiority, as in 'sir'.
This is its exact equivalent in Malayan. Another example is '*pulipuli*' (moon),
which is too close to the Malayan '*pulang*' for the similarity to be accidental.
And so on.

125 I profited from my stay with the Shirians by analysing some of their mental processes, their psychical reflexes and their reactions to conditioned phenomena such as come under the general heading of 'psychotechnics'. I had with me a few sheets of cardboard from the wrappings of my medical supplies, and a stub of pencil (lost for some time, this turned up in the possession of a good lady who was using it—with results that were hard to discern—as a cosmetic). I would write a word in very clear block letters, or I would draw a face, on one side of the sheet. Then I would give the pencil to a Samatari who had been following my actions with the closest interest and ask him to copy exactly what I had written or drawn.

I repeated this test several times, and some curious results were produced. They may contribute something of value towards the analysis of primitive mentalities, and I reproduce them opposite.

125 With this test, even at a first glance, we can make some contribution towards
157 a definition of the Indians' mental processes, which are still at the stage where
their intelligence is wholly analytical. They have not yet developed the power
of synthesis, which comes later. This is clearly shown by the Shirian copies of
the face. They render all the details, without, however, being able to unite them

into the proper shape, which means without the logical synthesis which gives 125
them their definitive value. As with his analytical copy of the face, so the 157
Shirian analyses the world in his thoughts about it, but forms no judgment on it, because to form a judgment would necessitate a higher power of synthesis that he possesses.



We now discovered that the Indians had chosen two very fine names for 123
us, by which we were henceforth known. Enrico's was Ilôh—howling monkey, on account of his red beard and its obvious resemblance to the alouata's tawny coat. Mine was Walé—wild boar: my hide was apparently somewhat similar to the peccary's. We had a good laugh over the names and were pleased to be known by them, because it meant that at any rate we had been accepted as
men like themselves, our beards being so much superstructure; we were just [101]
Indians or '*Sanemá*', which means 'people', to use the word the Shirians apply to themselves, the equivalent of the Makiritari '*Soto*'.

The fact that I was accepted by the *Samatari* as one of themselves has

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123 always filled me with pride. By setting about it in the right way we can always manage to make ourselves acceptable to our superiors, but no such effort will ensure the same result with people more lowly placed than we are: for this, the all-important thing is to possess a natural bent, a certain humility of spirit and a sympathetic understanding. One must possess the faculty of becoming, up to a certain point, 'primitive' oneself, adopting all the healthiest attributes of the primitive state, without at the same time losing one's own value as a civilised being: one must be primitive and something more—not just the 'something more' alone, which rather amounts to something less.

114 It often happens that scientific expeditions, or explorers of one sort or another, venture into regions inhabited by primitive men with the intention of studying them. They approach them with all the preconceived and presumptuous notions of men who have read up all there is on the subject, and every single human being who shows up on the river-bank becomes a savage and [101] must be catalogued like a butterfly. Thus the Shirians in all their slightly different types and sub-divisions are all called 'Guaharibos'—a name which means nothing and which the Shirians themselves have never heard. These scientific explorers may indeed take measurements of their faces and calculate the number of red corpuscles in their blood: the Shirians remain Sanemà for all that—people living in their own forest land, fighting their battles for their own special reasons, but ready to become men just like any others—because with a completeness and a simplicity that surpasses our own, they are men already. But scientific records lump the Sanemà and the Soto together under the barbarian headings of Guaharibo and Magnungbe, both contemptuous epithets, and humanity learns nothing from these explorers with their solar topees, who have scarcely got back to civilisation after spending a few months in the forest and learning all there is to be known about the savages before they start writing books about it. If these books could be read and understood by the primitive people they treat with, the authors would be rewarded with a volley of arrows.

VII

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(136) Living improved considerably and there was meat now in abundance: the banks of the Uraricoera were full of game. The best cuts were reserved for us,

and brought to us already cooked, in a wrapping of some appropriate green 23*
stuff—a dish beyond compare. At times there was so much meat (cooked and [263]
eaten without salt or spices) that we willingly turned to fruit again. There was
no lack of that either.

When a tapir or a number of peccaries have been killed and there is too 251
much meat to be eaten up at once, the Samatari smoke it on a hurdle supported
by four stakes driven into the ground. A fire is lit underneath and kept going
all night—to the accompaniment of the medicine-man's ceaseless chanting. In [432]
the morning the pieces of meat, looking completely charred, are wrapped in
wild banana leaves and entrusted for transport to some little woman who
hoists them up along with the babies on her back.

I have also seen a sloth being smoked. No gentler animal exists in the world. 123*
She moves at a speed which never exceeds a few yards a day, and lives hanging 136
on the trees with her young ones clinging to the hairs of her back. They captured [251]
one alive, and with the machete chopped off the three nails of its hands
and feet, to make scrapers and 'bodkins' for various uses. Deprived of her only [237]
means of defence, the sloth kept moving slowly along, with a resigned, human
expression which quickly won our sympathy. But not the Samatari's. To them, [412]
a sloth is an excellent target for archery practice, because it will remain in the same position—clasping a pole, for instance, without moving—just the sort of thing you want for a target. The arrows whistled past the sloth's wet nose, but its face showed no change of expression; then some struck it, but not in a vital part, and its fur reddened with blood. The arrows did not penetrate deeply because they were only practice ones, with worn tips. Had I had a gun I would have shot it, for there was such a look of gentle reproof in the little animal's eyes that it became unendurable. But the gun was a long way off, and our five remaining cartridges had been the subject of so much calculation, that perhaps after all I wouldn't have ventured to expend one on this four-legged Saint Sebastian. Soon, however, too many arrows had struck, and before the youngsters could get it to play with and drag it about in the dust, still alive, I asked for the machete. Laughing, in order to evade Samatari susceptibilities, I struck it one hard blow on the head which sent it straight to the smoking-tray.

We now had a definite plan laid and were spreading propaganda to make it 123*
possible, Uarema and the Guayca Indians being our agents. We had now made
the descent of the entire Aracosa and part of the Uraricoera, and before reaching

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123 the Quadu confluence we had wheeled round somewhat to the north, towards more uneven country where fruit was scarce, its place being filled by palm-hearts, a slightly laxative diet.

[802] It was night and Uarema was sitting underneath my hammock in the camp, counting the days. First on his fingers, then on his toes: three times altogether, which meant sixty days, or two moons, 'two pulipuli'.

The Samatari were listening, slowly taking in the idea and its implication: because now we had a plan of action for taking our departure, and it was based on these 'two pulipuli'. Our story had been thoroughly rehearsed in a council of war, with Uarema, Hashimo and Solituan in addition to our two selves. Sempronio was still with the boys. By now he was so well and truly Samatari-ized as to be unrecognizable. Narcissus and his companion had mysteriously disappeared.

The Guayca had approved of the plan, which was after all a simple one with no devious machinations about it. On the Merevari, from which we had come, we had a dump of merchandise, including everything anyone could possibly want. There was red cloth, which would make loincloths for the Samatari, and machetes, knives, axes, even dresses for the ladies, long lengths of cloth, shirts, and numerous remedies for sickness, besides something that counted even more—a big stack of guns. We would go to the Merevari accompanied by the Samatari, recover our store of goods, distribute it to them, and then altogether in a band, dressed, armed and equipped in all this finery, return to the Aracosa to live, making war on all their enemies, who would soon be laid low with the help of the guns.

Such was the story which the Guayca—interested parties themselves—undertook to spread among the Samatari. The latter thought it over well, and decided that it was reasonable enough. Every now and then, somebody passing would ask: 'Two pulipuli?'—just as if he was greeting us, or saying 'Good night'. Certainly, one must not hurry with Indians—one of the things they reproach us for is, in fact, our haste. This, combined with our hairy faces and our grim expressions, our stature and our superhuman air, makes us bad Indians, terrible as thunderstorms.

In a few days everyone was convinced that the plan was a good one. Fingers were counted to determine the length of the journey to the Merevari—which no one knew, though they had a general idea of its course. If we went direct, without retracing the steps we had taken on this provisioning march, or only the last part of it, we should take about eight days to reach the Uagna, where 123* we had the canoe. Our only worry was lest everybody should want to come along with us—as we had invited them to, in the hope that they wouldn't accept! However, if we found ourselves in the company of more of them than we could shake off, we could ask them all to wait for us on the Uagna, where it should be evident that the two canoes at our disposal could only carry three or four each.

But the Samatari understood this better than we did, being very sensible about such problems of logistics. If they came with us, they risked the well-being of their women and children in more or less unknown country where fruit was scarce. This they saw clearly, and after a discussion with the chief the majority of them dropped the idea. The medicine-man himself, who had put [756] aside all false pride and professional dignity, came along to ask me to cure him of the intestinal pains that were troubling him, and spoke of the 'two pulipuli', but he let it be clearly understood that the auguries for such a journey were not good, and that the Uagna was bad—there must be something about this river, for unquestionably rich as the region is in game, it is no longer frequented by the Indians. The Sanemà, came the verdict, would not accompany us on the journey, except for a few, to the number of the fingers of one hand, or maybe one or two more—presumably the medicine-man meant our special boys who caressed us in the evening, full of love and admiration for our two bearded selves.

The tribe also performed a ritual ceremony at the chief's direction, and this showed them that the day of our departure was not far distant. A group of men arrived, followed by their womenfolk: they chased off the young children who were being too inquisitive, and then approached Enrico. The chief had a long pole in his hand. He put it beside my companion and asked him to raise his hand as high as possible. Suddenly we understood. The Indians wanted some permanent record of this giant's height (Enrico stood about six foot three) which to them was phenomenal. This gave a certain official touch to the proceedings. Enrico limbered up, coughed, and holding himself erect, touched the highest point he could on the pole. The Samatari watched in the utmost amazement. Then they wanted Enrico to stand on tiptoe so that he could reach still higher. Then they notched the pole to his measure and ran through the camp howling in a random dance around it, jumping up like monkeys to see who could reach as high. No one succeeded, and after many jokes and sallies,

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this record of gigantic height was taken under the chief's roof. He was a proud man as he threw himself into his hammock that night.

VIII

One morning, after the medicine-man had been tossing about in his hammock all night, surrounded by his chorus of the faithful intoning the names of fruit, game and fish, the Samatari started shouting before they had stirred from their lairs. The light of dawn had scarcely filtered into the forest depths.

Something must be happening. Very soon our hearts swelled with joy and with hope. That howling, which seemed to come with one voice, though it was not exactly in unison, was giving us our marching orders. No doubt about it: '*Pullekè, pullekè*' meant 'go', and the only going in prospect was our own. Before long, Uarema confirmed this and Sempronio showed up in a lot of red war-paint, with a broad smile on his little woodland-devil's face. We said nothing. But we took our hammocks down rapidly and rolled them up, tying them with the usual liana cords.

We set out without any formal sign of farewell. Our boys, armed to the teeth, were ahead of us. Uarema was the first of the Guayca men to start. Hashimo and Solituan stayed behind to collect a few arrows, and came on after us. Sempronio skipped along at my side, looking up at me as if he wanted to let me know how happy he was now that the Canaracuni and the soft hammocks of Auai had entered his thoughts again.

Instead of taking the track we'd arrived by, we cut a new one to the north-west. This was fresh territory, but the boys crossed it without hesitating. We had ample provisions of smoked meat, two of our own machetes, five cartridges—they were in shocking condition but we hoped they would fire if the need arose—and we made good going, considering the nature of the country, which was bristling with a chaotic jumble of hills, and very deeply forested.

With dusk, just as we were cursing the Samatari and wondering when they were going to stop, we came out into a vast encampment which seemed somehow familiar. By opening up a direct path, our guides had rejoined the route we had taken on the provisioning march. We were now not far off the mouth of the Aracoa, a point we had passed a few days before. When the whole tribe

When the whole tribe is moving, weighed down with all its goods and chattels, progress is slow. A stage that takes it a day can be covered by an hour's quick marching.

Hashimo, with all his old gestures, and with all those grimaces which looked so expressive and meant nothing at all, slung his hammock cheerfully on to the same stake as he had used previously, and we followed his example. Sempronio, whose eyes were as quick as a ferret's and always on the ground (that is, the immediate food-horizon), had discovered a most curious thing. Somewhere near, there was fire. For a while, this alarmed us, and we sighed with relief when we discovered what it was. The Samatari, on our earlier visit, had set fire to one end of a large tree-trunk. It was very hard wood, but completely hollow inside. The fire had continued to burn slowly inside the trunk, which acted like a chimney and kept up a steady draught. I have seen fires of this kind last for weeks and then, when nearly all the wood has been consumed, burst into leaping flames.

Our own night-fires were quickly lit from this natural hearth, and silent from weariness we slept through our first night of almost complete freedom.

Hashimo and Solituan slipped away at dawn and returned a little later with a fish they had killed with an arrow in the Aracosa. It weighed no more than a pound and they cooked it hastily and ate it furtively—leaving poor Sempronio the bones, which he found on the ground later and sucked with a rather puzzled expression.

Our boy guides were in the middle of a palaver with Uarema. Something seemed to be amiss. They were making signs towards the Uraricoera—that is, in the direction of the tribe. A chill of fear stole over us: it looked as if we were being ordered back. If this turned out to be the case, however, all things considered we had a good chance of refusing the order and getting away with it. We had a gun with five shots, two machetes, four bows and a number of arrows. If necessary we could shoot once, to create an atmosphere of terror and then quietly slip away. They wouldn't dare follow us. But while Enrico and I were standing there planning these tactics, Uarema came up.

'The boys are off home,' he told us. 'Home' sounds an exotic and quite meaningless word in the Aracosa forest. 'We'll go on by ourselves. They say it's too far. There's nothing to eat on the Uagna, and nothing even before you get to it.'

The Samatari themselves had come up to us in the meanwhile, and were making signs towards their 'home' in the south-west.

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'*Auai,*' I said. '*Auasai*, yes' (where in a European tongue one would say 'no'). 'Yes, there is nothing to eat on the Uagna. People die there of hunger....' and I gave a burlesque performance of a person dying of hunger.

[576] This tickled them, and the first three of them went off—in these parts there are no greetings and no farewells. The remaining Samatari stayed looking at us without a word, and in his expression there seemed to be a longing—to follow us, to live with us, among all our marvels, over there on the Merevari and even further, along the great river with its rapids. But still he said nothing. We were putting our things together. He followed us with his eyes. Then, after peering at Enrico and me, he went over to Uarema and said something which made all the Shirians smile. In a second, he was gone, running off with his bow and arrows at the trail, to catch up with his comrades.

'What did the boy say?' I asked Uarema, who had started off along the well-beaten track.

'Nothing. He said he'd never have thought he would see men like you.'

Once more we were on our own. We had regained our liberty, but in place of the happiness it should have brought a certain melancholy descended upon us. We felt that we had left something behind, over there on the Uraricoera, and more especially among the Samatari themselves, that howling tribe of pygmies, bad men, Mongolians, and girlish types (our own definitions for the four groups into which they could be divided)—among whom we had left a little of ourselves. And that last youngster's phrase stuck in our minds. It was like the whole burden of a speech we had interrupted before it was finished—or rather, when it was scarcely begun.

Hashimo set the pace. It was a steady one, and infernally fast—he wanted to get home without losing a second, so that we were left with no time for sadness. We were kept far too busy. We footslogged all that day, finishing up what little meat we had left, and eking it out with a little fruit now and then.

Once more we slept in a familiar camp, on the river-bank, where the Guayca made a vain attempt to catch fish. No wild life was to be seen: the recent march of the Samatari had destroyed, or disturbed, all the animals in the district and the survivors would have fled up into the surrounding heights. Hunger began to rise in us like a tide, threatening to submerge us: and all the time Enrico was suffering from some explosive intestinal worms he had contracted from some rotten fruit he had eaten. This worried us because we had no remedy for it, and the sufferer's signs of distress were so evident that the Guayca were highly amused.

But for all this bad luck, we had one undeniable stroke of good: the weather, 123* extraordinarily enough, remained fine. We were now in April, when the dry season is at its height, but we knew that in these parts 'dry season' is a somewhat theoretical term. In some years, there just isn't one at all, and now that it was supposed to be at its height the rains might burst over our heads at any moment and reduce us to a sorry plight, on these clay hills, with hundreds of streams to cross. In fair weather the forest floor was clean, the air fresh and visibility excellent. Marching was easy, and had an excellent psychological effect.

At the first of the hills, when the track turned aside from the Aracosa banks, we came into a chaos of fallen trees. They stayed with us the whole day, all along the ridge where the path led. Enrico and I were ahead, and at one point we lost the track. Taking our bearings as best we could, we turned back, but found ourselves once more among fallen trees. The havoc must have been caused by a tornado. This is a rare phenomenon, and one we had never encountered [132] in forest country, where the dank and the constant rain keep the atmosphere in a state of equilibrium, which tends to ward off the storm. It must have been the genuinely dry season we were enjoying which had encouraged the hurricane. We were fortunate not to have walked into the middle of it ourselves: with trees being torn up and hurled down we should have been running new and serious risks to life and limb.

For the rest of that day we were trying to find the track, keeping our direction hopefully to the north. But it was late in the afternoon before we saw the Guayca again—thanks to a shot we heard quite close. Great was our relief. The sound of Uarema's gun had raised our hopes, and when at last we caught sight of the Indians from a distance we noticed that they were carrying something wrapped in leaves. But it wasn't game. Uarema had fired at a crane, but missed it. The parcels contained honey which they had found in the tree-trunks blown down by the wind. We gave silent thanks to the storm for strewing [262] honey in our path, as in the old myths, and that night we drank a mixture [272] of honey and water like the warriors of long ago and ate nothing but a handful of *podoimoss* gathered on the way. Wild honey, very runny and slightly acid, is [273] sometimes fermented already if it has been stored in the hollow trees for very long. To drink it gives one a certain alcoholic euphoria which with weak, starving men such as we were results in a state of complete prostration. We slept the clock round from dusk to dawn—twelve hours.

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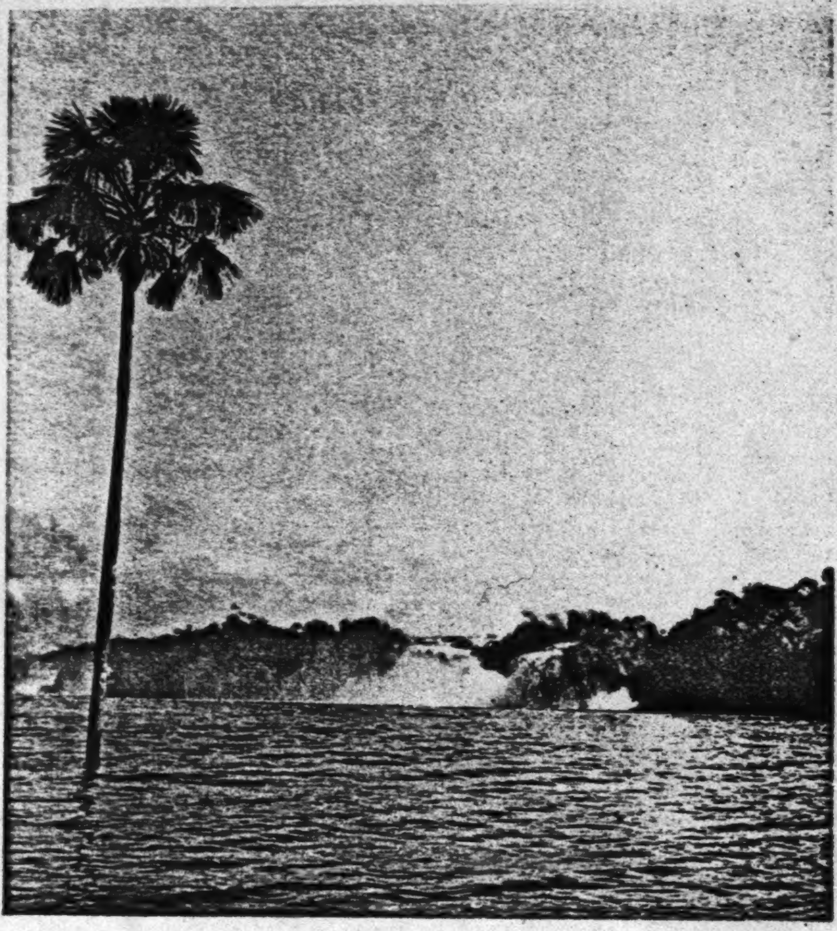
IX

Soon after we had started off again, Hashimo and Solituan struck off to one side of the track, following a little stream down its now waterless course. Uarema and Sempronio sat on a tree-trunk, and we did likewise. No one had the strength left to ask questions, and the reasons behind this pause were lost in a general indifference. Half an hour might have passed. From sitting down, I started lying down, heedless of the ants that were beginning to explore my malodorous body. From down the stream there came the sound of excited chattering—in a voice we did not know. Uarema, grabbing the gun, got to his feet. Enrico and I, sceptical that anything worse than the hunger we already knew could happen to us, didn't move a muscle.

Then, followed by the two Guayca, a creature came towards us, a grotesque creature who defied the imagination. A human being, whose degradation from man to monkey, from man to wild boar or tapir even, was complete. His wrinkled skin was covered all over with a sort of crust, which gave him the colour of a tamarind, in places almost a reddish violet. His hair was tangled like a lion's mane. He came towards us skipping and jumping, and then suddenly, on actually seeing us, fell on his knees on the ground, howling with astonishment. Then he leapt up, taking his hair in his hands and pulling at it, letting out an 'oh-oh-oh' of bewilderment that rose higher and higher up the scale. But he did not dare to come near us. The two oldest of our party surveyed him with a touch of complacency, as if our presence in itself entitled them to triumph over him. We now saw that he had a wound in his side still covered with scabs and clotted filth, and another in the knee which made him look strangely deformed.

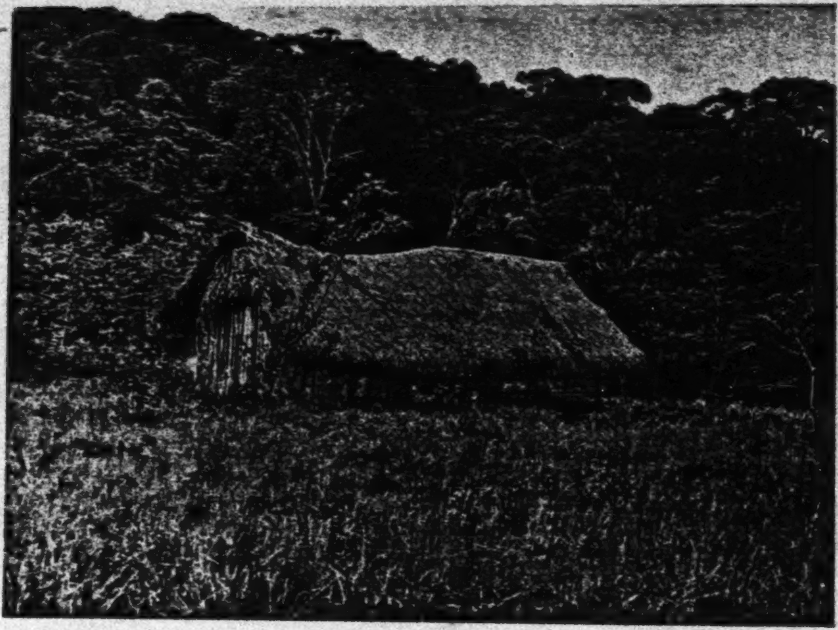
Uarema, after a few words with his own people, explained what had happened. Hashimo and Solituan had gone off in search of an old tobacco and cane plantation which they remembered from their childhood as being somewhere about here. They had not found it, but they had found this man, alone, hidden in a tree watching them. He only came down after they had threatened him with their arrows.

He was a Samatari living alone in the forest, hunted by all; more than once the others had tried unsuccessfully to kill him. His wounds were the result of



22. *The great Canaima Falls.*

[p. 144-A]



25. *Kirisochi's house - a year later.*

[p. 144-B]

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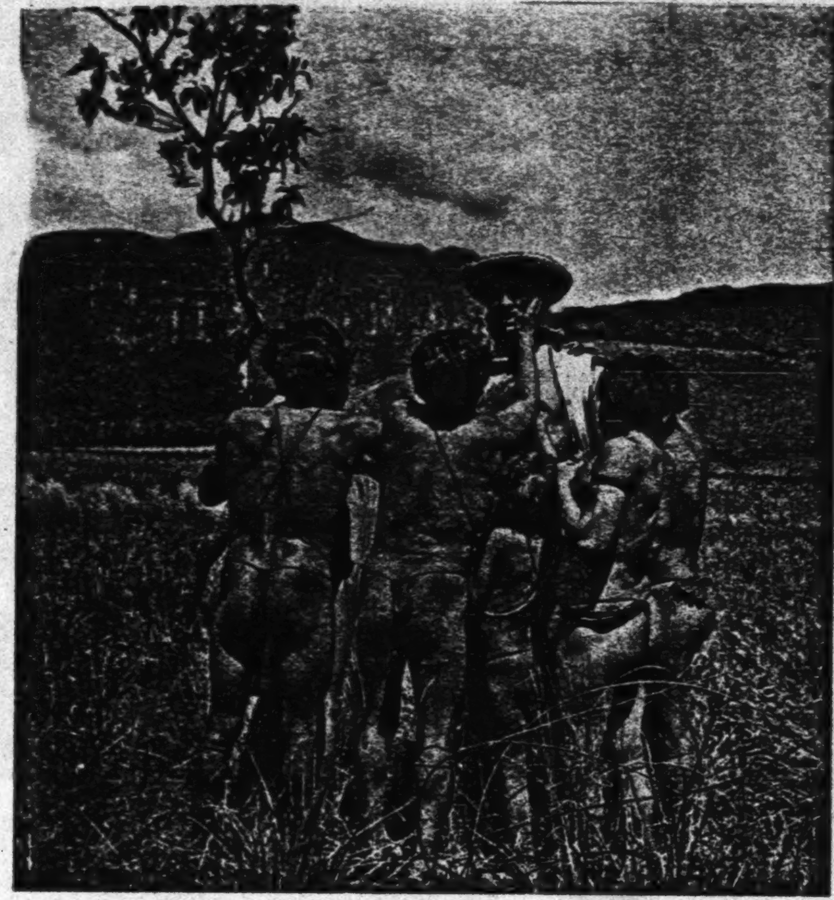
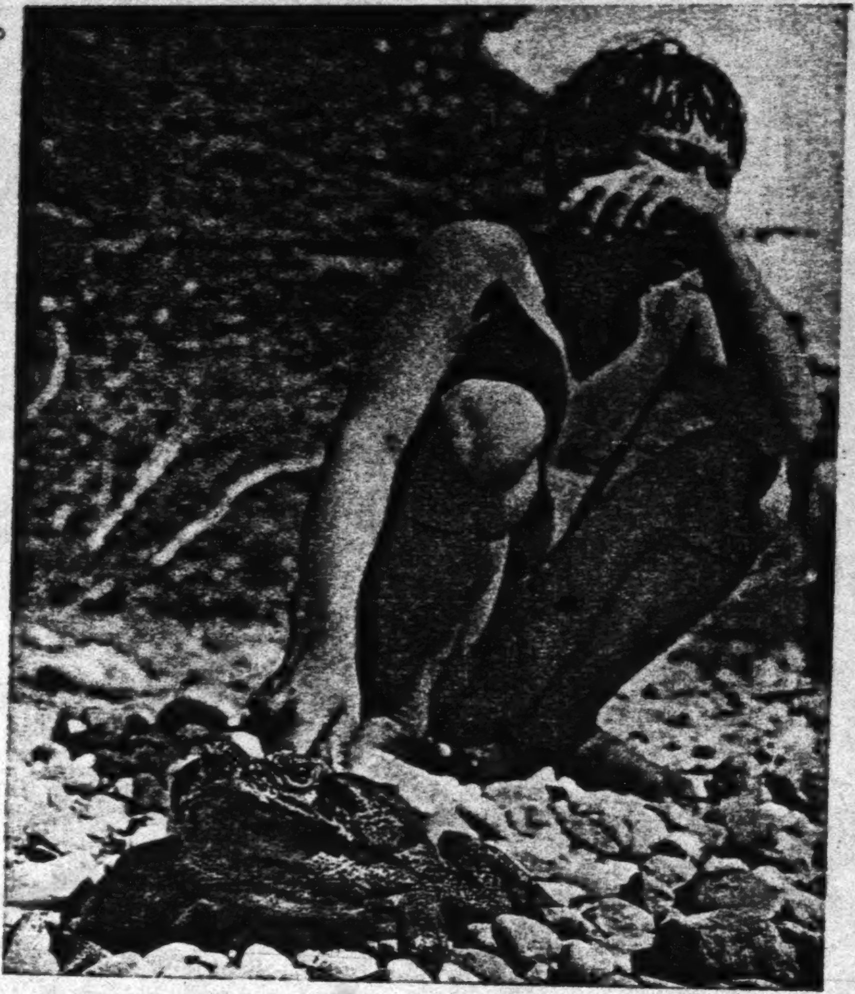


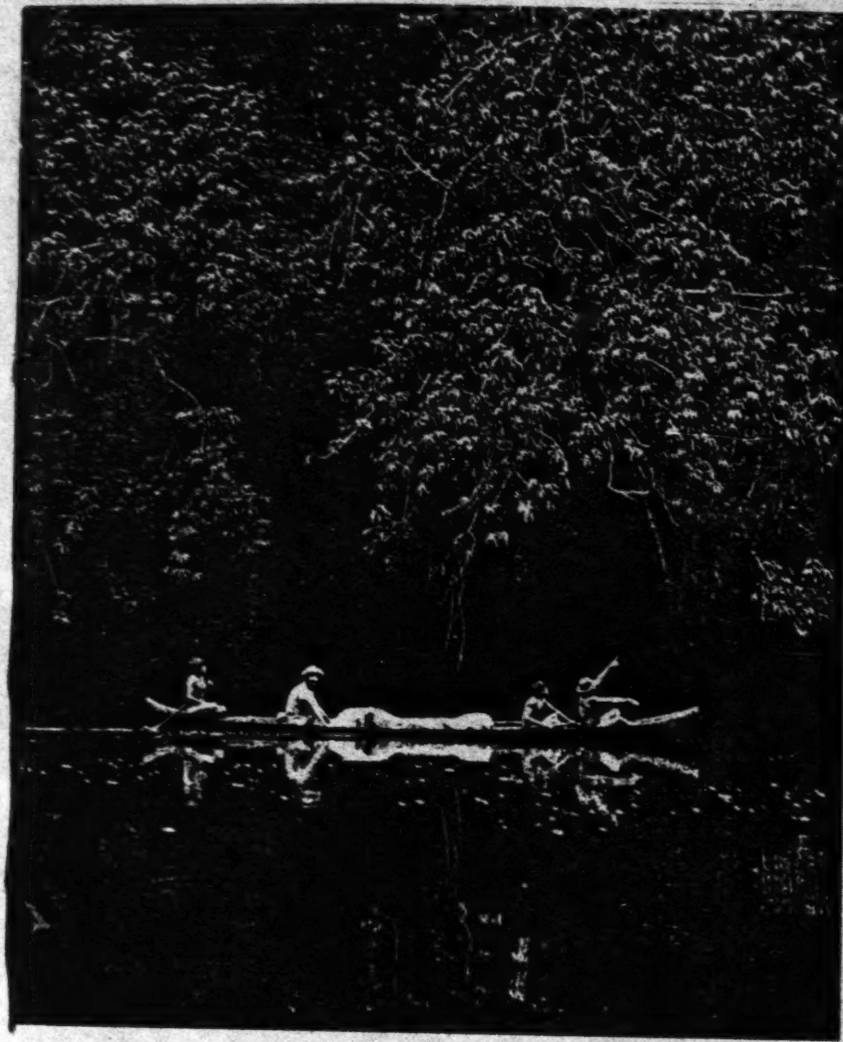
24. *Carmine undergoes anatomical inspection at Shyrian hands.*

[p. 144-C]



25. Sempronio brings his grand gift - a poisonous toad!

[p. 144-)]



26. The Merevari is quiet enough in its upper reaches.

[p. 144 -E]

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama
Sanema

Makiritare SS 20

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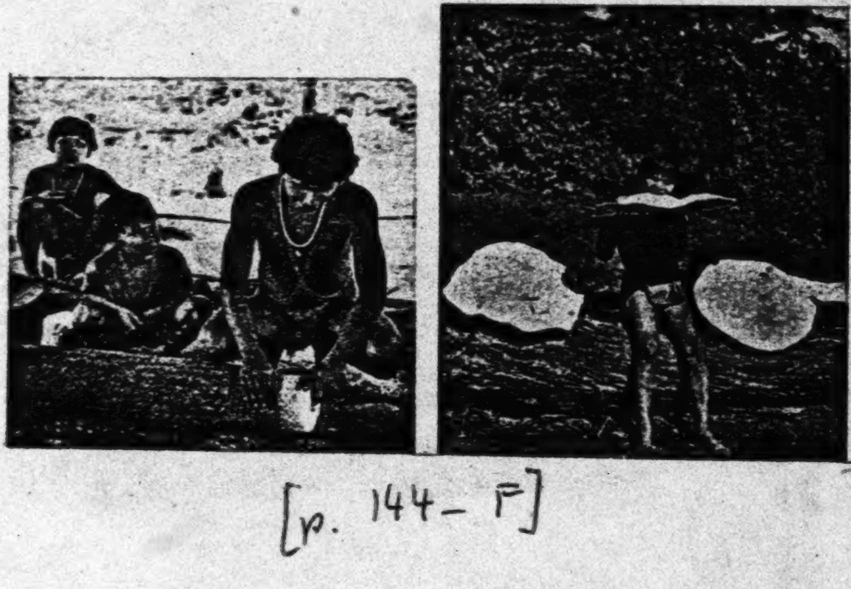
27, 28, 29, 30. *Cassave, the bread of the Makiritari, at various stages.*



[p. 144- F]

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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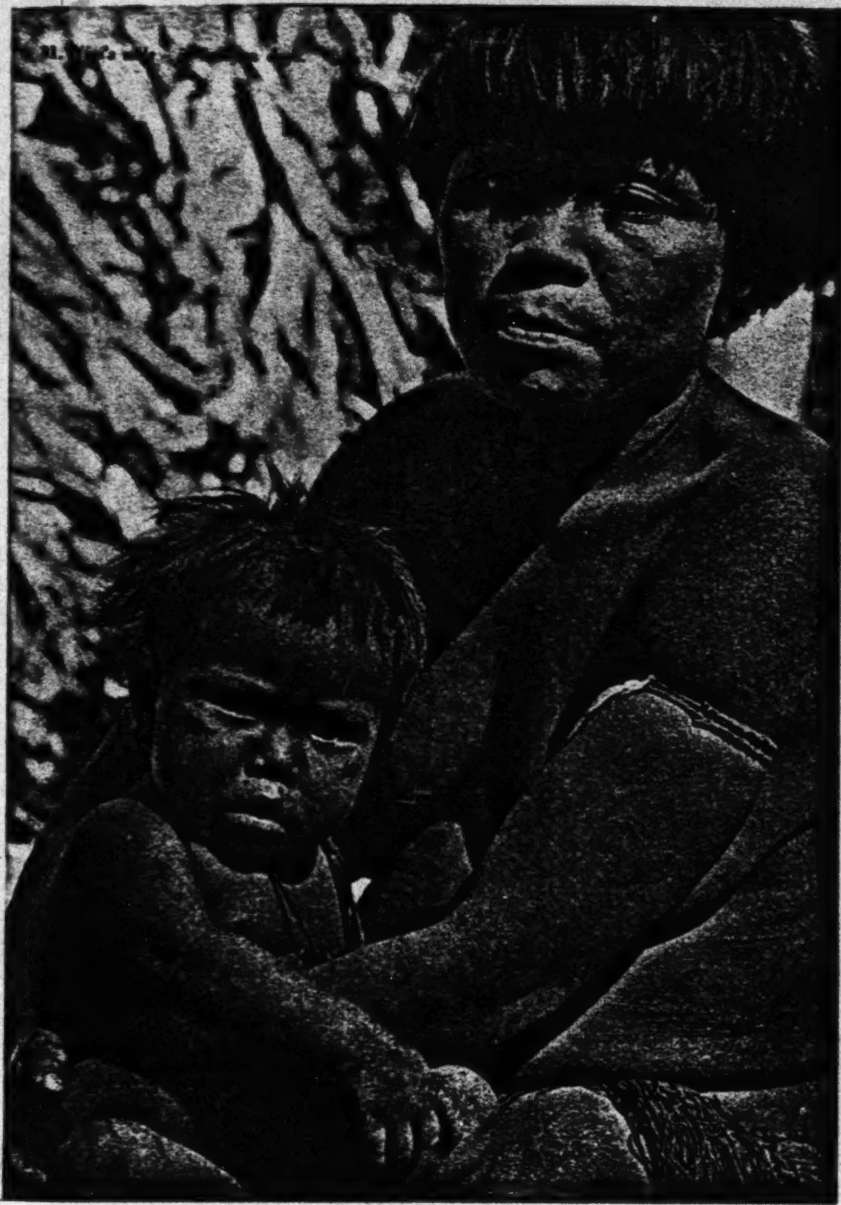

[p. 144-G]

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32. *A mouth-organ concert: the Sapuli children, the two brothers and the Captain's wife.*

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33. *The elder of the brothers has a troubled, cloudy look.*

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←

34. *Sad days for Carmine.*

[p. 144– H]

these encounters with his own kind, the one in his side being quite recent. 123*
Flight had saved him. Bitterest of all his enemies were the Samatari we ourselves had met with, the tribe to which he had no doubt originally belonged.

There was something almost unreal about this meeting with the unfortunate creature, and it was a little while before we could make any sense of it at all. The monster crept a little nearer, but his courage failed him. He stopped then, and looked at us, his mouth open in a long howl—or rather low gurgling sound—of amazement. Squatting down—the posture most natural to him, as if he had forgotten man's distinguishing feature, his upright stance—he hopped about to get a better view of us, every now and then howling something in the nature of a commentary to Hashimo—on whom he seemed to have made little enough impression. Sempronio, however, had instinctively drawn nearer to Enrico and me and I could tell he was frightened by the way he kept his eyes on the ground. The poor monster then told us, with a mixture of gestures and shrieks, about the last attack on him. It had been at night. He'd got an arrow in his ribs and a blow on the head with a club which had felled him to the ground, unconscious. So far as we could make out, he attributed his escape to the fact that his assailants had thought he was dead, while on coming round he had managed to get away without being seen.

But the most surprising thing of all came when he started inviting us to go along with him. With a broad sweep of his arm he pointed towards the east, where according to Uarema's version, after he and his brother had consulted together, he had a wife and child, living in hiding. Our urge to see a whole family like this was so strong that we would certainly have gone with him, had we not been starving. When we left him the Samatari stayed where he was, watching us with sad eyes. All the horrors of his life seemed to colour his despair. That man, hounded by all the humanity he knew living in the hostile forest in whose depths he had concealed his wife and son, with nothing but a wooden club to get their food with and fight off the attackers who were threatening his own life, stayed in our memories as the true symbol of the forest—that silent, secret place of unknown territories and lost epochs, of human beings yet to be born and monsters, conscious of their own despair, dying their mournful, lonely deaths.

I gave the solitary one a last tube of sulphonamide ointment for his wound. Behind me, as we left him, I could feel the presence of a bitter reproach for the uselessness of my gift, and for all those things which my better nature told me I

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ought to have done. But there was nothing I could do about it: we, too, were monsters, wallowing in the mire, and suffering like him our own despair.

X

Uarema and his Guayca men speeded up the pace so that it was difficult for us to keep up with them. In one little valley we saw a peccary galloping along and grunting. I hoped they would go after him: then the food problem would be solved, at least until we came to the Uagna. But Luis Antonio took no notice of the beast and went straight on. An hour later he told me the reason for this.

'The Samatari said that round here there are some bands of very bad Indians. They're the enemies of the Aracosa people, and they are trying to locate them to fight them. If we shoot, they will hear. We risk more trouble. That's why we set such a fast pace.'

So it was fear and famine all the way, over all the thirty-two hills of that borderland—and we were still two days' march from the Uagna. That same evening Sempronio left the camp, puffing and panting in a strange fashion. He returned with a crane. Sempronio had it plucked and cooking over the fire in no time at all. There wasn't much meat on the bird, and a couple of pounds of string and gristle was scarcely a meal for six spent men with an appetite several days old! But it was something to send down besides the eternal nuts and the worm-eaten bit of *sopah* we'd found on one sickly looking tree.

It was obvious that there was no hope of finding trees with fruit on them, or berries, or game of any kind, unless we got off the track the Samatari had been following. Where a horde of those voracious creatures had passed, there isn't even a snake to be found.

During the last stage of our journey, down to the canoes we'd left by the Uagna, hunger played the chief part. As we went up and down those interminable hills, hunger seemed to me to have an objective shape of its own, walking in front of me and beckoning me onwards with it, while behind us there walked another being, no less real: Fear. Fear took the form of a thousand Samatari arrows stalking us, driving us on through the boundless forest. We ourselves had no volition at all.

But at last, up on the heights where we had been captured, it seemed to us

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that we could shake off this fear of a Samatari attack. The drought of the dry season had rendered this area more desolate still. A dominant, well-defined mountain, it is tacitly assumed to mark the furthest limit to the wanderings of the nomadic tribes. Beyond lies the Uagna, which no Indian will cross or even live near, for reasons we cannot understand but which have something to do with its being an evil place. So now the driving force of fear fell away: but hunger remained, beckoning us forward.

Up on those heights we heard the mournful song of the bell-bird, but found no fruit. There was only the manaca palm, which offered its little growing shoots, bitter as gall, for us to munch as we went along: at least it gave the illusion of having something to eat. We made our way down to lower ground through a big chimney-like cleft where there were ledges for a foothold, leading to the bottom of the cliffs. Then we were in lush forest again and at least we had the old accustomed *podoimoss*, and now and then some more highly prized fruit, to fall back on.

We were getting our breath back on a little hillock when Uarema and Hashimo, after exchanging a few rapid mutterings, got to work on a pile of old tree-trunks as if they had seen something underneath. At the same time Sempronio fanned the smouldering brand which we always carried with us and coaxed it into flame. Solituan cut two long sticks. It looked as if we had come upon a naguti's lair and were going to drive the animal out. Enrico and I, straddling a tree-trunk, looked on wearily. We had no hope of results. In the distance macaws screamed out their derision, taking themselves off, with their useless flesh, into the air above.

Fire was introduced into one end of the burrow and the other end was shut off by a fencing of stakes driven into the ground to bar the animal's way out. The smoke was blown in as far as possible and a long prodding pole went with it. At the farthest point reached by the pole, more stakes were driven in to form another fence across the burrow. The animal would now be trapped between the first and the second row of stakes. The burrow sloped slightly downwards, and water was now poured into it to drive the quarry still further along, and the fencing was accordingly advanced. But next time the stakes were moved they encountered solid earth—which meant that there was no animal there after all. Hunger had probably weakened the Guayca men's powers of reasoning so that they were expecting some miraculous intervention which would turn the aguti's lair into the aguti itself.

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Automatically we set out again on the march. And now there wasn't so much as a bird fluttering near—with the sole exception of a very small species of sparrow, an accursed bird that follows the traveller and twitters now from one tree, now from another in the opposite direction, so that before long you lose all sense of direction unless you can shut the song out of your ears.

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The last camp! Before we stopped, we happened to find a *holasidi* bush. This is a kind of plum. The stone is big, and there is little actual flesh on it, but the flavour is perfect. Uarema was the only one of us with enough strength left to climb the tree. Once up, he started calmly helping himself, quite oblivious of those down below. When his brothers reproached him for this, he shook down a branch or two. The Indians fell on it, devouring the fruit. Enrico and I waited, just as if we were at table, not liking to serve ourselves first. The result was that we had to go without. We couldn't believe it. And there was our dignity to consider. When they realized that we had none, we announced that we didn't eat *holasidi*. It wasn't good. It upset you. Heroically, we tore ourselves away.

Our last evening brought us a novelty diet: a bunch of flowers. Sempronio went off to the stream and soon came back with armfuls of yellow flowers like the tufted ears of corn. This was the flowering plant whose leaves had been wrapped round such wonderful meat delicacies in the good old days of plenty. They were put over the fire, a bunch of three or four at a time, and toasted. When they were done, you tore off the top of the calyx and sucked at the lower part. The flavour was nothing very much, and there was very little to get your teeth into. But we were innocents at the game. This flower is the refuge of a myriad white worms a few millimetres in length, and it is these which give it its real alimentary interest. The worms are sucked out of the base of the calyx in a sweet pulp, and when a series of gurgling noises from Sempronio put us wise to this fact, we didn't hesitate for a moment to follow his example. The worms were really as sweet as butter, and if we needed any justification we could claim that they were the poor relations of protein.

XI

Our famine ended the next morning in a mighty bang which brought down a gigantic curassow. The bird, as big as a good-sized turkey, was soon roasted and devoured. The rumblings of Indian bellies paid deep organic tribute to a new world of flesh and blood. 123* [262]

The boats were where we had left them and the river was a little lower. Many of the rocks, green with moss, were now above water-level. The camera was there too, under its leafy roof, along with a quantity of salt, matches and some coffee-extract. The place was rather inconvenient and dirty for a bivouac and we decided to press on straight away in the hopes of reaching a hut, about two hours' journey downstream, which we had run up when we were there last.

As we reached it, however, there was a contretemps. The Indians didn't want to stop. When we asked them to land, they took no notice and went on down river. We hadn't the slightest inclination to go any further that evening, because we knew that there were no huts waiting for us between this point and the Merevari itself—half a day's journey away. But the Guayca, by one of their mental processes which we often found unfathomable, had taken it into their heads to go on. They were Samatari-ised now, and flying the flag of rebellion. A good many times they had imposed their will on us, but now we didn't feel at all disposed to shrug our shoulders and let them get away with it. The day before they had treated us badly over the *holmidi*, but we'd been too weary and too famished then to do anything about it. But this latest attempt to tyrannize over us, however innocent the motive behind it, was the last straw. Grabbing a paddle, I smacked it into the water and brought her head round with a force that almost overturned the canoe in the swift current, making for the shore. The Guayca were flabbergasted.

'We're stopping here,' I said calmly, picking up the gun so as to be ready for any eventuality. 'Unload your stuff. . . .' Since they made no move, Enrico and I threw their arrows, bows and paddles on to the bank.

Without any further fuss, we went off to sling our hammocks under a ready and waiting roof. The Guayca stayed where they were for over an hour, shouting and muttering their complaints over our decision, but the onset of night convinced them that it might be better to join forces with us. They came along with a bewildered, sheep-like air, and slung their hammocks under the hut too. After that everything was merry and bright again, and the incident was forgotten. Our dignity had suffered somewhat in Guayca eyes during the time we were in Samatari hands, but this gave it a substantial lift. There was less likelihood now of any disconcerting pranks on the part of the Indians,

* 125 who are always capable of taking it into their heads to walk out just when the expedition has reached the most dangerous point in the whole forest.

Among races less advanced than our own, it is memory, rather than intelligence, that is defective. Indians forget very quickly indeed. Two hours later, Luis Antonio asked for the gun so that he could go and get something for the pot. We still had three cartridges, and the river-bank, at night, is the haunt of a good many unsuspecting animals. I gave him the gun, and the three shots went on a lapa. The beast was far from cleanly killed, but its arrival was providential. It weighed over twenty pounds. We cooked it and ate it that same night, before dawn.

Going down the Merevari in the sunshine was a most pleasant experience and brightened our spirits considerably. When we came to broken water, Solituan, who was just a 'passenger' with no paddle, held back the water with his hands. We tried not to smile: the old fellow was a reclaimed Samatari, a fine type, and we were very fond of him. He still looked on us as superhuman beings and delighted in our physical presence. One or twice, when he thought we weren't looking, we saw him eyeing us with admiration, and expressing it in little guttural grunts.

*123 502 [133] A few hours above Llantariña there are some big rapids where the river takes one roaring plunge down over a granite shelf, while to the left a side-stream makes its way more quietly through a rocky channel where the current is extremely swift but without any sudden falls. Uarema irritably made up his mind: after inspecting both ways of getting down, he decided on the secondary channel, claiming that he and his brother had shot it on one occasion. We disembarked and went down to the foot of the rapids where the rushing waters were swallowed up with a dull rumbling noise in a wide pool of whirling foam. Here we waited for our more daring companions.

Now, as never before, we cursed the accident to our cine-camera. We had no chance of filming that hair-raising descent. The canoe looked quite insignificant at first, up there on the lip of the falls. Then it came on as if it was flying, growing larger with every split second. Halfway down, with Uarema and Hashimo howling in imitation of the Makiritari on similar crazy ventures, the craft began to swing round till it was broadside on to the stream. We gave it up for lost, but as it swept on it glanced past a small rock and righted itself again, bows forward. Seizing their opportunity immediately, the two Indians

[23* [502]

brought the canoe shooting past us like an arrow, to finish up in the big pool, where some hard paddling brought them to the bank.

At Llantariña we found many signs of Guayca occupation, but there was no one about. Luis Antonio urged us on, as usual, explaining that we should catch up with his people further down, at what he called 'Wide-Beach River'. As it turned out, we found them there, in a rough encampment on Samatari lines—if it hadn't been for the fact that some of the faces were half familiar, and that a few of the men were wearing loincloths of red material we had provided, we might have taken them for Samatari.

'They've come here after the fruit, because it's the dry season.' Such was Luis Antonio's explanation, but it contradicted what he had said not long before, when he had assured us that his people had crossed the river because they feared an enemy attack. 'Much war,' he had told us then. Our man had been trying to give a heroic touch to what was very simple fact: his people were out looking for provisions, they weren't on the war-path at all. But this betrayed their nomadic origin, which Uarema, who knew civilization and knew how far removed the Samatari were from it, was anxious to disclaim and conceal. He had reached that stage of sophistication where he preferred to accept and admit the barbarism of war but not that of hunger.

[574] [262]

When we slept with the Uarema Indians that night it was just like being back among the Samatari, such was the resemblance between these tribes and so similar their behaviour. Once more we ate the sacred *sopah* and a whole series of fruits we were familiar with, and went round sampling little leaf-parcels which the Guayca, with genuine hospitality, were pleased to offer us. There was tapir, deer, lapa, guan, curassow, all sizes of fish, bananas, cassava-bread in the Makiritari style, fine pawpaws and little pineapples—the kind that burn the lips.

The effect of such abundance on us was euphoric. Did our euphoria then spread to the Indians, or was it the other way about? A general dance started, with all the old songs, but for us at any rate it was soon over. In our weak state everything began to go round and round before our eyes, and we felt slightly sick. Hashimo was grinning. He looked rather like an animal let out of its cage, as he went about talking to his kinsfolk, who were crowding round like monkeys to listen. He was making gestures towards Enrico and me, evidently telling about various incidents of our captivity. Then I shouted out, in the Samatari medicine-man's tone, and imitating his vocal effects:

*

123 'Samatari, olahi . . .'

Everybody laughed, and called me Lahalla, lahallatuan. My fame as a magic-man had accompanied me across the cordillera and was rapidly spreading down the Merevari.

XII

We had made our rendezvous with the aeroplane (in a letter I had managed to send on) for the 15th, 16th, or 17th of April. It was now the 13th. We should have to hurry to be at Kirisochi in time, calling at Pancho's on the way, to collect Jean, the American girl we had left there. Uarema didn't want to come along. He said he had too many things to do. We thought it might be his irritability again, or perhaps some woman was involved. We filled the gap he left in our crew, which now numbered Romolo and Caio in addition to the ever-faithful Sempronio, and set off for the Canaracuni.

At the junction with the Indians' river-elect there is a little island whose grassy surface rises above water in the dry season. Then, after a few bends, one passes the mouth of the side-stream which leads to the Pulipuli settlement. Further on still, the Uana runs in, marked by Pancho's big hut, surrounded by the low roofs belonging to his Shiriam workers, about an hour's journey away.

We were rounding the last of the bends when we saw two boat-loads of Makiritari pushing out of the Uana into the main stream. Then a little later a third appeared, slightly behind them. In it sat Jean, towering over a crew of very small Indians. Screened off by the vegetation of the river-bank, we paddled on in silence. We weren't seen by the other canoe until we had come very close, There were the usual impersonal grunts from the Indians—and then Jean, who had been staring at us, thunderstruck, with a strange, fixed look and dilated eyes, got to her feet in the canoe and started walking towards us. The laws of physics came into operation immediately, and the girl who had begun to walk on the water only succeeded in taking an impromptu bath. The Indians looked on unmoved: the incident did not appear to interest them. Jean could swim, and her walk hadn't taken her very far from the craft. She was fished out and hoisted on board again, where she burst into a flood of tears. Enrico did his best to comfort her, but his success was incomplete, on that day, or any of the three that followed. After that the plane took Jean away.

He handed his uniform of shirt and trousers back to us and returned to the same state of humble nudity as all those cousins of his who were looking on in silence. 600

Olatiri came back when night was well advanced, using a burning brand for a torch. He was the bearer of five machetes. The final three were beyond recovery, because the Shirians further up the river had gone on a journey to the westward and it was not possible to catch them up. Auai was so anxious for us to believe in the story of the up-river Shirians that he must have been rushing about the forest like a wild boar. We felt quite sorry for the old chap. We threw away five red seeds and gave him a tin of sardines to eat with his cassava bread.

We solemnly declared, to everyone's great relief, that although three machetes were still missing, we would not call up the aeroplane. The three remaining seeds were thrown away, and we all went off to sleep like brothers.

◆

With the matter of the theft cleared up, the population of Kirisochi con- 123*
tinued to swell, and one day Sempronio too arrived. He came alone, looking most diminutive, with his hair cut *à la* Guayca. His father, who was already with us, announced his coming when he was still a long way off in the long grass of the savannah. The old man took me by the arm, repeating 'Sprr, Sprr' and pointing to the boy. Not till I recognized who it was did it dawn on me that '*Sprr*' was the Shirian for 'Sempronio'.

The year before we had made a vain search for a giant toad of the type that 123* 126
spouts poison from its cheeks. Sempronio had remembered this, and had one with him now. It was enormous. He must have caught it somewhere on the way here, and now he made his offering with his usual half-animal smile. He had certainly brought in an extraordinary specimen. The poison, which is simply a highly caustic secretion, not dangerous to man, had been removed. I quickly photographed the toad, on the gravelly bank of the river. Sempronio and Nero were also in the photograph, but the latter hid his eyes. He didn't want to be reduced to the same dimensions as the animal.

Another visitor was Manuera. His child, according to his own idea, had an 123*
eye infection, though it was very difficult to discern. He wanted us to cure it, and we used some ophthalmic drops containing terramycin, with which the father seemed satisfied.

[pp. 153 – 184^{185} not processed]

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*Y 123 177 When I showed Manuera how to start a fire with a big magnifying glass he understood immediately that the process must involve some direct relationship with the sun, but the others missed this point. They tried to make the big magic work indoors, in the shade. Our old guide therefore became the lens-expert, and amused himself for a whole day burning off the savannah—until he endangered the hut itself by firing some freshly cut straw which we had piled up on the south side.

M 123 122 We had already made some tentative and tactful inquiries of Pedro about forming a Makiritari crew to take us at least as far as the higher reaches of the Merevari, where we might find other Indians with whose help we could reach Prenario, on the Yevarehuri. The Makiritari were ready to start off at once—though this was highly unusual for them—and a crew got together quickly, with Pedro as steersman. Tomasso, his son, and four other strong Soto would paddle. Recruiting proceeded rapidly—too rapidly, and therefore obviously prearranged. Pedro naïvely confirmed our suspicions when he told us we should move off quickly and not wait for Pancho. Now we had expressly said that we wanted to send for Pancho to accompany us, because we knew that to have a chief with us would increase the prestige of the expedition in the eyes of other tribes.

'Not wait for Pancho,' declared Pedro. 'Pancho has much merchandise because he stopped so long to work at La Paragua. I, Pedro, know the way and have no merchandise.' Whereupon Pedro's discourse began to centre on the good old red cloth, and it appeared that our man wanted a whole piece. 'Much cloth, yes, little cloth no use. Pedro wants a whole piece of cloth, then he will start for the Merevari, long trip, we need to sleep many times.'

If the Makiritari had been quick off the mark to accept the assignment, they were equally tough when it came to terms. We closed the door of the hut, to avoid misunderstandings, and began a big hand-out: red cloth, machetes, fish-hooks, knives, rope and so on and so on... all in amazing quantities, the like of which had never been seen in these parts.

Silently the Makiritari surveyed the rising piles of merchandise on the earth floor. With their usual dourness they asked for more still, while the Shirians outside tried to see what was going on through the gaps in the wall, howling with deep emotion at the sight of such vast acreages of red cotton passing into
Y
*[123] the Soto's rapacious hands. A store of goods like that would have set in motion every Shiriam from the Caura to the Orinoco and enough battles would have

Makiritare SS20

Y 123*

been fought over it to destroy the entire race. But all the Uana-Dildep and the M
Kologli could do about it now was to howl out loud in their complete helpless- 122
ness, and cling to the walls of the hut like monkeys. 123

We should certainly have liked to give them something, but apart from the fact that the length of our trip and all the unforeseen things that might happen made it advisable for us to be as careful as possible with the goods we needed for wages, we couldn't take more porters than were necessary: the expedition
would be top-heavy. Besides this, to introduce Shirians into the crew would M
have put the others in a bad humour. They were the superior race, and could [186]
not allow the others to compete with them in their work.

We packed our baggage with care, painting the tins with a special red varnish to keep them waterproof. There was some of the varnish left over, so we painted our straw hats too, and they emerged from the treatment with a
proud and martial aspect which made a strong impression on the Indians. Y
With the final scrapings of the paint tin the Shirians painted themselves and [186]
then went off in triumph to their homes, with enough tales to last them a whole year—all about aeroplanes, machete-thefts, varnish, and those accursed Makiritari who'd taken all the red cloth and left the Sanema, as ever, in dire want. M

Carmine set out first in a light dug-out canoe, and I followed him next day 123
in Pedro's big craft. A little below the landing-beach we met with a canoe Y
coming up river, labouring against the stream. It was loaded with Guayca: 123*
Luis Antonio, with his brothers and cousins. They had only just heard of our arrival and were coming to find us. It would have been embarrassing to have to refuse their services, but Uarema himself broached the subject first and saved us from any awkwardness by telling us that he would have been most willing to come, but had work on hand, burning off and clearing a *conuco*, that would keep him busy for a month. He would come along on the next trip. He wanted to know who else was taking part in the Shirian Expedition, and he kept on our tail all day, saying that he would like to be of any help he could. But I knew very well he was after some little gift—our stores were new, and made his mouth water. In fact that evening, when we had joined up with the advance party (they were in camp on the headwaters of the Turucuma, a right-bank tributary of the Canaracuni which runs very close to the Upper Merevari)—that evening, Luis Antonio got up to his old tricks and asked for presents outright. I had to get rid of him, so, next day, without anybody else knowing, I

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Y

*123 gave him nine metres of cotton cloth and sent him home, highly delighted,
Y with all his companions.

#123 To cross from the Turucuma to the Merevari, according to our reckoning,
502 should take us two days, along a well-beaten track much used by the Indians
M
123 in their frequent comings and goings between the two rivers. But owing to the
502 excessive weight of our baggage the two days became five, because we had to
M
Y cover each stage of the journey twice. The Makiritari played another trick on
[648] us here: at the last minute they produced a number of Shirians from Pulipuli out of a hat, by some conjuring trick, and made them do the work for them. Naturally the Shirians claimed that we ought to pay them, even if payment only amounted to a small piece of cloth and one machete. Any attempt on our part to put this injustice right would have been over-optimistic, and would probably have had unpleasant consequences: there was nothing to do but submit ourselves once again to the caprice of the 'superior race'.

On the last lap of the portage, when we were waiting for the Indians to come up from the previous halt with the last of the baggage, a horde of savage Shirians came along. At first we were alarmed. To judge by their hair they were Guayca or Samatari, but they presented an extraordinarily squalid appearance. Nevertheless, they must have had some gleam of humanity in them, because the leaders—including two old fellows who looked more like champion cattle than anything else—came forward unarmed, after making a great show of laying their bows and arrows on the ground so that the gesture shouldn't be lost on us. They were Ukumatari, a tribe living in these parts: they had sent their emissaries on a courtesy visit to Kirisochi last year. Little by little they came crowding up on us in our little hut-shelter: we had a job to keep a clear space for ourselves and prevent them from surrounding us completely. At last Pedro came along, having out-distanced the main body of porters, and at the sight of this invasion he looked badly scared.

'Samatari?' he asked, setting down the load he was carrying on his back, and keeping his eyes averted.

'Ukumatari!'—the response came in a chorus from those nearest us, as if they were anxious to make a good impression.

At that, Pedro looked more himself again, and began to eye the Ukumatari-Shirians carefully, searching for a familiar face. He had lived round the Turucuma for a long time and must have had some previous contacts with these

Makiritare 5520

M 123

people. But he didn't seem to recognize anyone in particular, and once more 502
he hung his head and stared down at his feet. Y *

No one seemed to know quite what to do next, so I decided to get what 123
advantage I could out of the situation and suggested to the Ukumatari that they 502
should help carry our baggage as far as the Merevari—which would save us a whole day and night. Their chief—who needed no encouragement to show off his battle scars—agreed to this readily enough, and a few hours later the straggling caravan of the Guayca Expedition arrived on the Upper Merevari bank, near a *maloca* that the Soto Indians occasionally used.

VI

Y *
123

Long and laborious were our attempts to get the loan of three canoes. We M
had to start by doctoring all the invalids in the area: one of our patients was an 122
old fellow with a terrible sore—evidence of Leishman's Disease—on the back of 123
his hand. The fame of the riches we were carrying was soon spread by our guides, who were quite willing to bask in the reflected glory of it in front of the local people, but at the same time didn't want the Shirians to know too Y.
much. The Ukumatari served us well, like the good-natured, willing savages [465]
they were, but all they got out of it were two boxes of matches for the whole M
job: this being what they came along and asked for, after consulting with our
own men. We were forced to buy two of the canoes we wanted, although we [439]
should only be using them for three days. The Makiritari were after our goods at all costs, and a loan didn't suit their purpose so well. M

We were two days on the Merevari and one on the Yemecuni, the right- 123
bank tributary stream whose upper reaches run very close to the Yevarehuri [133]
and therefore to the Amazon basin, there being no mountains to intervene. There was nothing of any great interest to record on this part of our journey,
as far as the mouth of the Camacuni, a tributary flowing in on the right bank of M
the Yemecuni. Here there was a Makiritari hut, totally abandoned by its [342]
people. It was a big round hut, like Pancho's but better finished, its outer clay
wall decorated with geometrical designs painted in red, based on the patterns [531]
of some of the basket-work. The *conuco* was a big one, and the tracks leading to
it still clear and not overgrown. Pedro told us something about these inhabi- 100
tants of the Camacuni region. From what we could make out, it seemed they

[PP. 190 - 192 not Processed]

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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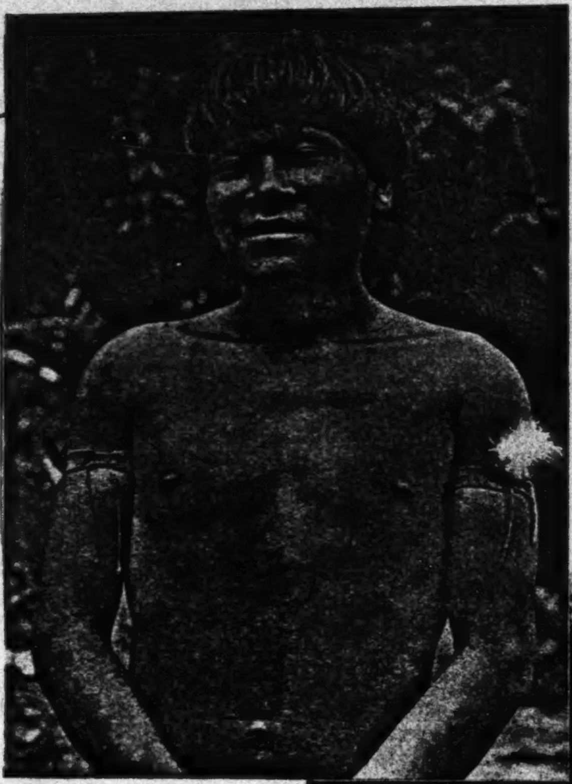

35. Dolfuss was pale and handsome.

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36. A typical primitive: a man of good will, ugly as he is.

[p. 192-A]

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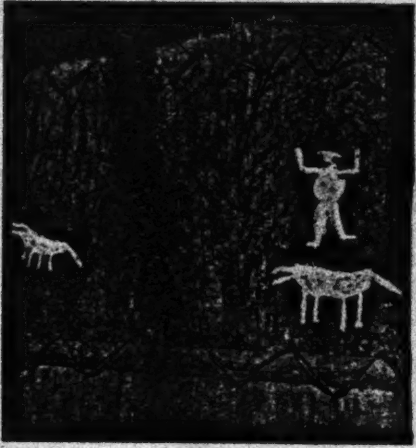
37, 38, 39. *A Makiritari house. The interior shows murals based on Indian myths: cows and the clothed figure of a man appear in this design.*



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[p. 192 -B]

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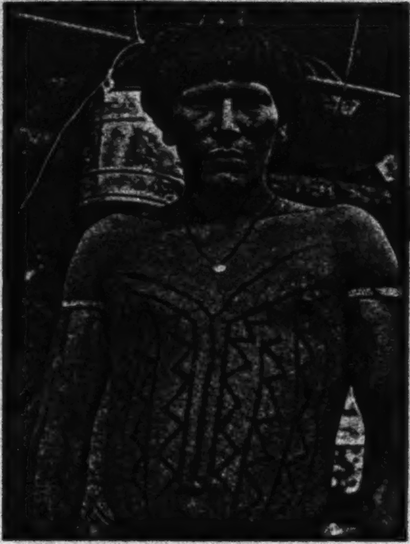
40. *La Boriotta.*



41. *Captain Carlos' son.*

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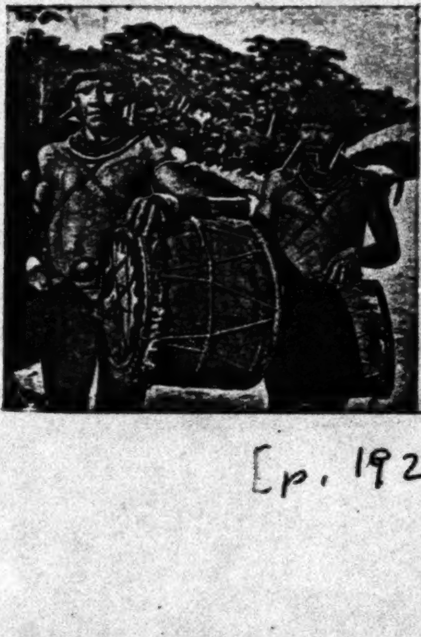
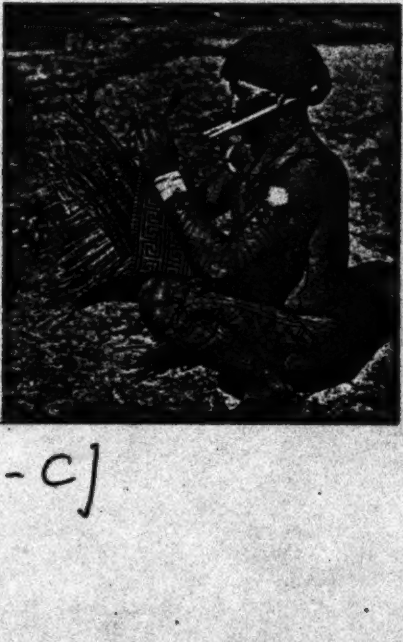
42. *Makiritari drums: Pedro and Tiziano.*



43. *Warcka Pedro weaving a basket for the Guayas Expedition.*



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[p. 192-C]

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

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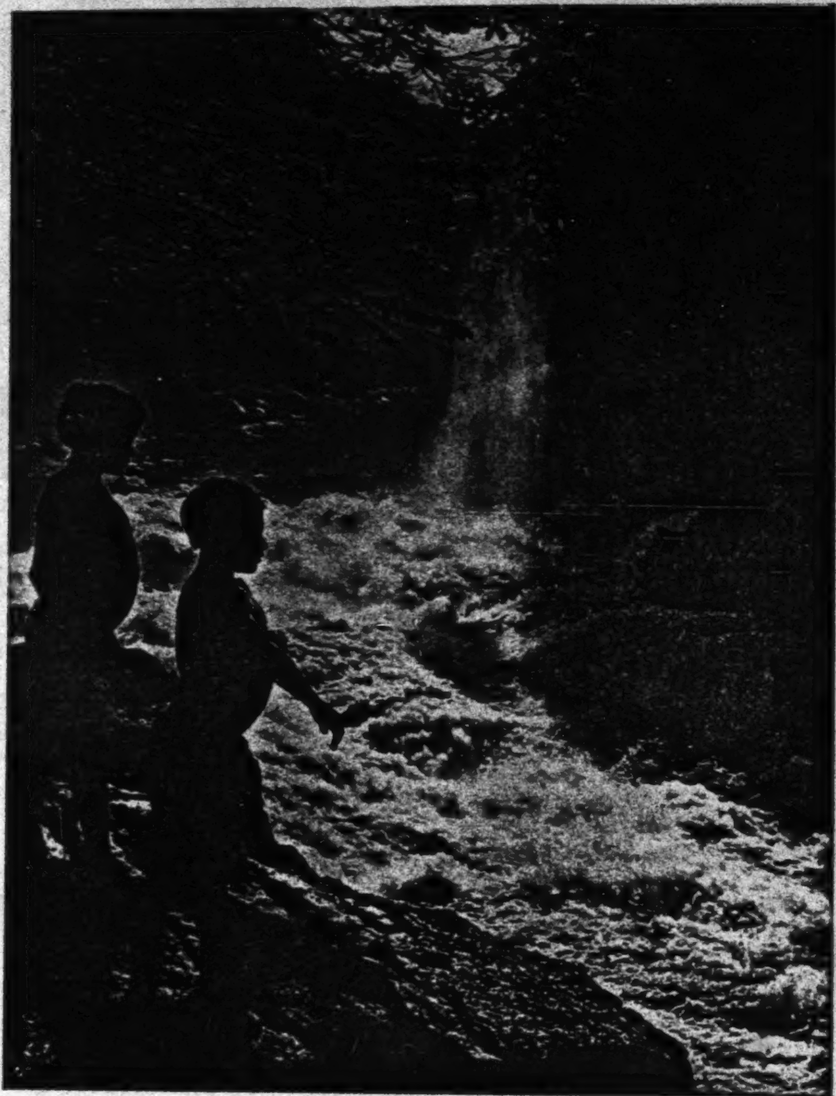
44. The charge goes into the blow-pipe: a demonstration by Nahanahana.

45. The blow-pipe in action.

[p. 192-D]



46. *The Mono Falls.*

[p. 192-E]

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

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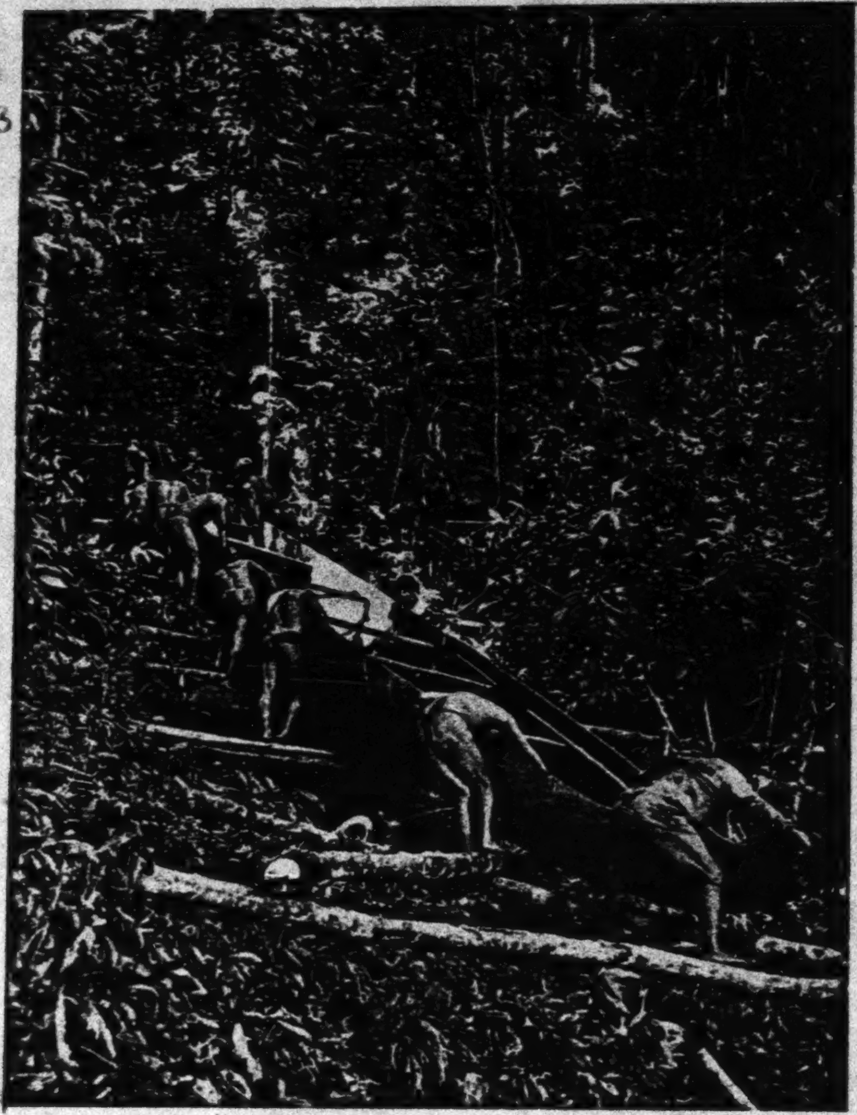

47. A masterpiece of boat design takes the mountain road.

[p. 192 - F]

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48. A dramatic moment on the Ventuari.

49. The end of the rapids.

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[p. 192 - G]

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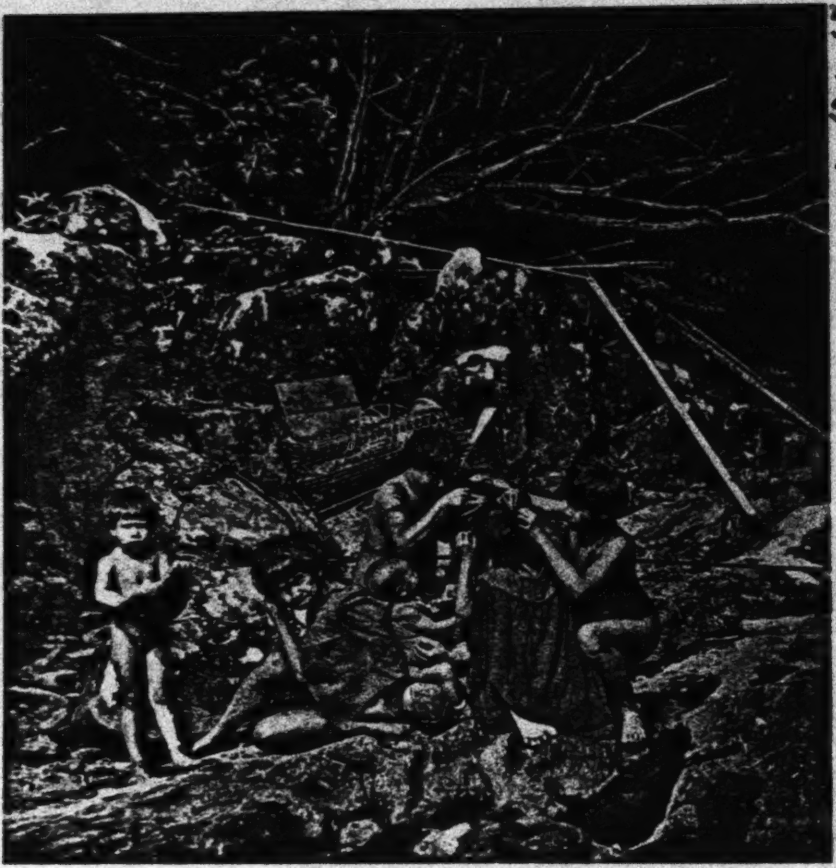

50. *While the men brave the falls, their women-folk pause for hygiene.*

[p. 192 - H]

8

The Tang of the Earth

I

123*

CARMINE had hoped to benefit from the Guayca Expedition in one particular way: he wanted to give up smoking. He had only brought twenty packets of cigarettes with him, and they had gone even before we left the Merevari. Now he was gritting his teeth. I had tried to talk him out of his praiseworthy resolution, having seen many a man—even less heavy smokers than he—go quite frantic and risk poisoning himself sooner than have nothing burning between his lips. I was once out in the blue with two companions who started insulting each other when the last packet of cigarettes had gone, accusing one another of having stolen them. They were in anguish, trying to find some substitute for tobacco. I got them some leaves which had a strong nutty flavour. Mad for something to smoke, they tried them eagerly.

The leaves smoked well—they even called the flavour superb. Indeed, they swore they wouldn't leave the forest without a good supply, because after smoking anything with that wonderful aroma they'd never be able to get used to ordinary tobacco again! Two hours later, headaches and vomiting started. They showed symptoms of poisoning for the whole of that night.

I didn't want my new friend to submit himself to such dangerous experiments, so I advised him to try tobacco *à la* Shirian. As a joke, I got them to roll him up a huge quid. I was hoping thus to kill two birds with one stone. With this monstrous plug between his teeth, Carmine would not only satisfy his craving, he'd be incapable of talking about it! But he wouldn't have anything to do with the suggestion. Gritting his teeth, he clinched the matter with one succinct phrase:

'Everything or nothing—that's me.'

And that was his last reference to tobacco.

[pp. 193 – ~~196~~ 197 not processed]

*Y 123

The day after our Makiritari crew had gone we betook ourselves and all our bags and baggage into a Shirian settlement. They were friendly people, somewhat scared of us, and attentive to our every move. All in all, we weren't M sorry to have missed Frenario, who would undoubtedly have turned out to be [123] some mangy and pretentious imbecile, lording it over everybody like some Asiatic despot. In talking about it to my companion, I summed up my attitude thus: 'If you're going among the Makiritari, take Makiritari with you. If you're going among Shirians, take Shirians.'

The itinerary we wanted to cover wasn't perfectly clear, even to ourselves: after all, our journey was taking us through one of the least explored parts of the world. But it was certain, at any rate, that we should be crossing territory inhabited by Shirians (especially Samatari and Guayca). It was even more certain that we should meet with no Makiritari or other people full of sweetness and light.

[Y 361] That same evening we picked out the men we wanted to take with us—though it would be more correct to say that we had them wished on us, because Y in this settlement, which lay hidden on the left bank of the Yevarehuri, [511] five or six bends down, there weren't a great many Indians fit for the job. These were peaceable Shirians, but their living conditions were some of the most [178] wretched we'd ever seen. It was really as if by the very fact of having given up their warlike habits, these people had forfeited their right to live as well as possible. From warriors, these people had gone to the extreme and become anchorites.

One man didn't want to come without bringing his wife and child—and the medicine-man!—along too. What was more, as crew-leader we had a man of middle age who was morally head of the little clan, and something more. His wife, with a baby boy at her breast, would also be coming. Then there were two boys, one of fifteen or so, the other of more tender years. Altogether it was the queerest crew two explorers of unknown territories could ever have put their faith in.

Y 123 177 To gain time, we wanted to set out straight away, but our people gave us to understand that we must wait a day because they had something important to do. In the meantime, while ostensibly preparing the loads, they were anxious to have a good look at the equipment we were carrying. We let them get on with it, until they came to the pack containing the good old red cloth and other objects which might have been too much of a temptation for them: at this point, we pronounced that magic word 'work'—so potent that in the very act of pilfering, their hands were stayed. 123 177

We had brought with us a flask of mercury, for amalgamating metals, which aroused their curiosity—curiosity which turned to absolute amazement when they picked it up and became aware of its inordinate weight. By some dark and labyrinthine thought-processes, no doubt, they deduced that this terrible liquid constituted a bomb, and they drew back in horror shouting '*Bomba Amio*'.[1] [126]

We didn't disillusion them. A little fear and dread disseminated among our porters might not be entirely without point, considering all the uncertain aspects of the journey and the curious make-up of these Indians. Yes, we said, that is the aeroplane bomb, and it would blow to pieces all the Samatari from the Parima, if they dared show themselves on our route. This greatly reassured the Shirians. At first they had been rather scared of meeting with an enemy, but now they could count on this terrifying weapon we had at our disposal, which would also increase their own prestige in the eyes of the nomad tribes.

That night, there were some strange noises in the hut, about thirty yards away from our hammocks. Something interesting seemed to be happening, so we put out our candle and, through our mosquito nets, watched a curious scene. 123* 776 789

The medicine-man was surrounded by the rest of the Shirians. He was in his usual position for exorcism ceremonies—sitting in his hammock with his legs dangling over either side. The chief's wife had a bowl of water and was dissolving something in it—something she was taking from a cluster of banana leaves in her lap. When she had put in enough, she passed the bowl to her husband, who held it firmly, slightly raised. Then he waited. Suddenly, on an unexpectedly powerful note, a chant came from the medicine-man. Then the chief drank long draughts out of the bowl, came down from his hammock, and began to walk with a rhythmic, solemn step, round the fire. All the men then drank in turn: then the women. Then the babies at their breasts were made to touch the bowl with their lips. Now they were all marching behind the chief, with rapid, tiny steps that covered very little ground, while the medicine-man himself jumped from his hammock and brought up the rear.

We were watching the Drinking of the Ashes—a ceremony symbolic of [266]

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[1] Their rendering of the Spanish 'avion' (aeroplane bomb).

789
*123

796 266 [766] cannibalism. When someone dies in battle, or through some other violence—when he dies, that is, in the full prime of manhood—the body is cremated on a pyre and the ashes scrupulously gathered. Mixing these to a paste with water, they make a block which is wrapped in banana leaves and kept for the ceremony of the Drinking, by which they believe that the dead man's strength can enter their own bodies. Such ceremonies generally take place at large assemblies, people from neighbouring tribes also being present, and the festivities may last several days. Our Indians, however, wanting to assure a good augury for the voyage they were about to undertake with us, had limited themselves to a shortened version of the usual ceremony, since in these particular circumstances there was neither the time nor the opportunity for more.

II

*123 In three little canoes, two of them the property of Frenario's people, we went down the Yevarehuri, making for the point where it is joined by a slightly smaller, darker stream flowing from the south—the Matahuri. It had been raining ceaselessly for days and the rivers were overflowing their banks, which made it difficult to find a camping-place for the night.

On the second day we had two fair-sized falls to negotiate. The third day's paddling brought us to the Marahuri, but we left it to the right of us, its mouth being apparently quite blocked by fallen trees, and entered a smaller stream just to the south of it, which offered quiet water and a clearly defined course between the giant vegetation of both banks. The Shirians told us that this new waterway was called the Toroli—that is, the Turtle—and that we had only to go up to the source to find the track crossing the cordillera which led to the north side of the Upper Parima river.

[136] [262] Our crew was hardly sufficient and progress was exasperatingly slow. Happily, there was plenty of game. Guans and curassow were plentiful, as well as monkeys and sloths—the Indians' favourite dish.

Our head man was a real lead-swinger. From the first day onwards he complained of a pain in his foot which made him draw the line at heavy work. Under the drenching rains that fell with every interminable afternoon, he would sit in the middle of the canoe, and also in the middle of the bananas we were carrying, holding a palm frond over his head. If we urged him to do something to help us put on a little speed, he would only smile, show us his foot, and say 'Nini, nini!'—hurt, pain. So we called him Nini, but it did not rouse him from his lethargy. Finally we took him into our own boat, which was the heaviest, and put his wife as steersman. 123*

We were five days on the water altogether, and on the fifth we had a curious encounter. Rounding a curve of the stream, we came upon an absolutely diminutive canoe. Three young Shirians were sitting in it, silently waiting for us. Two of them we knew already from the Yevarehuri landing, where unknown Shirians had often come to have a look at our baggage when Elis was guarding it. There must have been some understanding between these three young fellows and our crew, because the encounter caused nobody any surprise, and the new boat joined our expedition.

I had seen more reassuring sights than these three vagabonds, but we weren't altogether sorry to have met them, all the same. It meant that at last we had a crew with a decent proportion of fit men. Physically fit, at any rate: what their morale was like the future would show—and the future was a very unknown quantity in the valleys of Parime.

The three youths were magnificent specimens of savages. They had impenetrable eyes, a fierce aspect and wonderful muscles. Authentic brigands, they looked, or soldiers of fortune ready to go anywhere and do anything—especially if it was anything bad. Carmine swore that two of them bore a striking resemblance to two brothers of his whom he had left behind in Italy—a pronouncement which led to our calling them 'The Brothers'.

They were prodigiously active and agile, and their entry into the picture put new life into our expedition, which so far had been moving with the slow and stumbling pace of Nini himself. But how the three brigands happened to turn up like that we never did get clear. They had started before us, and we rather suspected that they had not only been all along the river already, but had made their way over the cordillera too, and were coming back when we met them.

[181] Indians by nature are essentially false, their falsity consisting in a trick of believing—and asserting—not what is true, but what is desirable or even just convenient. This intrinsic falsity made us wonder now. Had the brothers gone ahead to the cordillera to warn some Guayca tribe, who were even now preparing to ambush us and steal our goods? It looked very suspicious, but whatever they had in store for us we should have to accept, because there was no

* 123 other way for us to get through this unknown forest region and somewhere, some day, come out alive.

But for the moment our three adventurers were only suffering from an enormous hunger. The last pieces of our tapir soon disappeared. So did our bananas. As we got near the uplands, game grew scarcer. Hungry days began again. Whenever, as a rare treat, we were eating some small bird—having fried it so as to eke out the food value with fats—the three of them would stand round us, watching us chew in silence. Every tiny bone we threw away, after picking it absolutely clean, was promptly seized upon and sucked as if there was honey in it! One evening, when I threw a mountain-hen's leg-bone into the river, one of the brothers jumped in after it with no hesitation at all.

In the Toroli there were a few small fish, the kind the Guayca call 'the old ones' on account of the rather pessimistic expression on their flat faces. The two women were expert fishermen. Carmine, who was always hungry, used to urge them on to begin as soon as we made a halt, his gestures eloquently describing the catching, frying and eating of the fish. But what really made the women co-operative was the reward he promised them, with further gestures indicating how beautiful they would look with their bosoms and their bellies draped in that lovely red cloth.

III

After one last day of tricky navigation—we'd encountered one obstacle after another, with the rain beating down all the time—we came to the final landing. As we rounded the last bend in the river, we saw a few curassow fluttering up into the trees. The medicine-man was first out after the birds. He didn't get one, but he killed a snake and flung it into the boat for his evening meal. I was just behind him, taking aim at a bird. I brought one down from a very tall tree, and hit another which flew crookedly down over the river and fell somewhere on the opposite bank. One of the dogs followed it up, barking. Carmine brought down another bird, while Nini followed the dog. He had the child on his shoulders, since his wife was already busy plucking the first curassow I had shot.

We started building our shelter for the night. Every now and then the Indians gave a shout across the river, calling Nini. Then something odd happened: the chief's answering shouts seemed to grow more and more distant, and at last ceased altogether.

Night fell. Nini had stopped answering. He was lost.

When the rough hut was finished, we gave the three brothers our torches and sent them out after the chief. His wife had started weeping in her hammock. Every now and again we fired off a few shots, hoping the Indian would hear them. But some hours later the three brothers came back again, with the torch-batteries used up. They hadn't seen a sign of him.

An oppressive gloom now hung over the Guayca Expedition. The wife was lying on her face now, crying more and more bitterly.

In the morning we arranged three search parties: two of the three brothers went south-east—the direction in which our camp was facing. The third brother and one of the husbands went south-west, along the track we intended the expedition to follow. The two boys went west along the right bank of the Toroli. The medicine-man didn't feel called upon to make any move at all, probably because by virtue of his holy calling he felt that he ought to remain, morally speaking, the central pillar of the expedition. He went on eating snake and chanting exorcisms, as he had been doing all night long.

The day passed wearily, with the woman crying all the time. Every now and then I tried to comfort her, telling her that Nini would be found any moment now. The various parties came back bringing grubs, honey and palm-hearts, but no news of the man, the child and the dog. That night too the medicine-man went on with his exorcisms and the widow with her weeping. Parties went out next day again, and came back empty-handed, though they claimed to have found, south of the camp, a place where there were signs that Nini had spent the night. Somewhere in this direction, it appeared, there should be a track leading eastwards, which would bring one to the neighbourhood of some Shirian tribes, and from their territory, by making a wide sweep still further east—so the brothers explained—one could reach other tracks leading to the lower Yevarehuri or one of its affluents.

It was useless to go on with the search. Even the wife had wearied of her tears. Grey-faced and unbelieving, she listened while the men gabbled excitedly on about tracks which might exist or might not, through forest reaches ever more remote. We convinced her (and after an effort we even convinced ourselves) that Nini would get home safe and sound, with the baby and the dog too, that he must have met a good many Sanema friends at some point or other

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on these uplands, and that when she got back to her hut on the Yevarchuri she would find him sleeping in his hammock with lots of cassava and no more *nini*—no more pain in his foot. There was much that was laughable in this explanation of ours, but the widow didn't laugh: she was most serious when she accepted some cloth and a few corals which we gave her as a first instalment of the compensation for the loss of her family.

We had wondered if these events would cause our people to desert us, but to our great relief there was no sign of this happening. The expedition could now get under way again, even without Nini.

But the track that should have led us over the cordillera suddenly played us a trick. After leading us over one small hill, it took us down to the same river again: and so it went on, merely following the same general direction as the Toroli. This meant difficult going, over a rain-sodden clayey terrain and through thick, suffocating vegetation, putrescent now in the flooded depressions. That first day we crossed and recrossed the Toroli seventeen times, and instead of growing any smaller, it became a strongly flowing stream once more. Some of the crossings were highly dangerous, with the water breast-high.

Night always seemed to overtake us suddenly, when we were half dead with the effort of it all. After missing two curassow the first night, we doled out a little rice for supper, cooked with salt and butter, which everyone shared. The Shirians apparently liked it, and saved half for breakfast. All night it rained again, turning the camp-site into a marsh. In a dryer season the Toroli, at this height, would hardly have amounted to anything at all, but now we began to use fallen trees as bridges in order to get across it. The Shirians, with the three brothers as leaders, acquitted themselves remarkably well.

The next night, just after we had camped, the beam of my torch caught two little eyes that shone white like magnesium flares among the trees. I didn't know what it could be, and fired quickly. A shower of flesh spattered down on the leaves over a radius of four yards or so, and half an opossum fell to the ground. This little marsupial is called '*rabo pelado*' in Venezuela on account of its shiny, hairless tail. Need I say that in a very short time this scrap of meat had been devoured by the brothers—nor did they offer even a mouthful to anyone else, not even their fellow-Shirians.

Next day brought more hills, more natural bridges, more drenching rain. Once more we slipped and slid, through the mouldering vegetation, once more we ate rice with butter. Evening found us a little higher up, in a featureless region. There were no streams, only dirty pools of mud and water tinged red with the clay. The track, inexplicably, was now taking us south-west, across lofty hills which grouped together were almost a cordillera in themselves. 123*

The absence of game was typical of the higher altitudes, marked too by the coldness of the nights and the incessant rain which fell both then and for the greater part of the day. [136]

From one steep slope, we suddenly saw the lowlands—a great valley lay spread before us, full of cloud. On its far border rose two enormously high peaks, conical in shape and completely covered with a greenish-black fuzz of forest. Over the leafy surface drifted soft veils of cloud, wafted on the rising breath of the valley. Through the trees nearer to me, I caught a glimpse of another, isolated, mountain almost lost in the clouds behind the two wooded peaks.

For a moment I had a deep awareness of the vast size of the forest: I absorbed it, as the roots of all growing things absorb the tang and savour of the very earth itself. Regions vaster than the life of a man! But more terrible than the vastness of the jungle was the vegetable life it supported—the expression of its universal power.

Euphorbia trees, with their soft wood and the nuts beloved of macaws, transforming that same tang of the earth, within their secret filters, into the white milky sap that rises like a tide to swell their bark. Giant *guaranda* trees, generously scattering their legions of seeds on the earth to kill them forthwith by their own shade—so that the hope of seeing some new young tree rise up to keep the old one company must go ever unfulfilled—a blind orgy of creation that leads only to the death of the young: until at last the old tree crashes down and a great patch of sky is thrown open and the sun's rays pour through, to nurse the little ones and raise them up to look out over the tossing waves of the forest surface. Sandalwoods, sweet-smelling as incense. *Tacamacchè*, distilling crystalline balsams in the chilly night. Cedars that the lightning splits as cleanly as an axe. Kapoks and Cecropiae, rapid in growth as if the very earth itself was swelling upwards to explode into the sun: light-timbered scatterers of seeds that are launched on the wind to bear the fecund message of their light-limbed race to every corner of the forest. *Annonaceae*, springy as steel, soured by their own store of bitter sap that holds back the milder, more insipid water. Ebony trees, secure in the hardness of their wood, the living outcrop of the mountain's 137 mineral core. *Miconiae*, afraid of the dark and only conquering their fear by shooting out their branches like fists against the throng that hems them in. *Clusiae* with their poisonous spirit, embracing their frank and upright neighbours with their green endearments and smothering them in their coils like the parasites they are.

Tall and mighty Cassias, glorious verdant mountains decked with gardens of flowers, heavy with the great weight of their fruit, the hollows of their trunks a sanctuary for bees, a splendid challenge to storm and tempest and a safe refuge for the young disciples at their feet. The twisted Ficus with its strangely buttressed roots, a Gothic monument with its arches, ribs and tracery; an athlete, a contortionist in a world of trees geometrically straight; bountiful of its fruit and its soft gums. A whole eager population of *vochusiae*, *rubiaceae*, *cealpiniae*, *bonnetiae*, *sapindaceae*, *mimosae*, *sapotaceae*. Palms like hypertrophic grasses, swelling their stems up into the proud semblance of tree-trunks: old as the origin of the world, and offering at every season a branch laden with sweet fruit, hard and heavy as the days of its life on the wind-tossed heights.

A population of cellulose and chlorophyll, mighty, awesome, endless—besieged by a vast army of the halt, the maimed and the blind; by parasites and procuresses, forgers, poisoners, physical and moral invertebrates, strumpets and swindlers of every shape and size. For these, too, have their place in the forest and their assault has a violence and intensity which only the great trees, standing clear and four-square, can resist. Liana enwreaths them and writhes round them, to their peril, in all its varied, fatal forms: wire-liana, tying the tree to the ground: chain-liana, manacling it: climbing plants, coiling round it like snakes: passiflora, whose evil flowers are like nails driven into the quick of the tree: curare and barbasco that foul the air with the reek of their death-dealing purpose. Mould that creeps slowly round the trunks and lichens that seep into the cracks and fissures of age. Ferns brush round the base of the trees where the tusks of the peccaries have torn wounds in the bark. Fungi, the pansies of the mouldering earth, colonize the great low-sweeping boughs. Bromeliads spread over the remoter branches and there discharge their content of foetid water imbued with insect remains. Orchids cling to the soft bark, and their evil flowers put out mocking tongues. While mistletoe growths of parasites plunge their steely darts into the very heart of the tree and draw out the sticky gums that link their destinies with the mightier growth.

A vast and multiform horde it is that besieges the trees; a people millions 137
strong, each one of whom wages its own small war and combines with the
rest in the greater struggle.

IV

In the three brothers, all that was best in this wild region could truly be said 123*
to have found some form of expression. Their reactions were at times incomprehensible—sudden reflexes resulting from a life utterly different in every way from our own and in some degree akin to the animals'. They were always together, not mixing with the other Shirians and building their own little separate shelter. Every night, when work was finished, they came to us, rubbing themselves against us and indicating by gestures what goods they would like for their pay.

They had certain phobias, the most interesting being a fear of nails. Carmine 123*
always had a long nail handy, and each evening he would hammer it into one 177
of the hut-poles to hang up his gun and cartridge-case. This produced a terrible 823
effect on one of the brothers. He would stand and watch as it paralysed, for all 152
the world as though the nail was being driven into his own forehead. If Carmine showed him the nail, holding it out to him, he would cry '*Ma, ma*' and
run off to hide in his little hut. Generally, however, he was most friendly, even
affectionate, towards us. Carmine had once rashly promised to cut his hair 123*
for him, and since a haircut for one meant a haircut for everybody and the 302
expedition's only pair of scissors was precious, we lost a whole day while my companion gained some experience of the barber's trade. The Indians spent their time looking at themselves in the glass and examining each other's coiffure for defects which they wanted attended to at once.

In imitation of the tales the Shirians told, Carmine had invented a terrifying 123*
personage called Barabàn, a kinsman of his, who lived somewhere over the mountains. Barabàn made such an impression on everyone that the myth became a real moral weapon and came in very useful when the Indians needed a little prodding. When Carmine told his tale, in a mixture of Shirian, Makiritari, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian, they would listen with eyes like saucers, in curiosity and fear: 'Barabàn and a hundred robbers and a hundred fierce dogs—they live in the trees like monkeys—eat women and children, cooked—

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
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drink blood . . .'—'. . . and sand,' I added humorously on one occasion. After that, every time he told the story, the two final phrases came out religiously. Whenever Carmine, with appropriate gestures, arrived at the point where he said 'Drink blood', I would look round at the audience and a chorus of Indian voices would chime in: '. . . and sand!'

V

The rains continued and the track brought us nowhere near the Parime, or any navigable tributary. The Indians had no reasonable explanation to give, and only offered a string of strange names that might have been rivers, or mountains, or tribes of Shirians that we might meet. On the tenth day we reached a little stream which seemed to run in the right direction, but the Indians assured us that this was not so. No one on earth had ever explored this area, and we had to take the Shirians' word for everything. We coaxed them along all the time by promising their wages when we reached the banks of the Parime river: we were half afraid they might decide to leave us in the lurch halfway.

To cross the little stream we had to cut down a big kapok tree for a bridge. Once across, the Indians went forward on the next stage, according to our usual method while on the march: first the Indians took the less valuable part of the equipment a stage further, then they came back for the packs containing the trade-goods and the rations, so that these were always under our control. On this particular day, they returned very late in the afternoon. They were nearly exhausted, and from their garbled accounts we gathered that they had had to cross a big mountain. Next morning shed a little more light on things. The Indians made signs to us that we should stay where we were, with some of the packs. The going was too hard and an extra journey would be necessary this time to transport everything.

So we stayed by the stream, and so did the two women, though they usually went off loaded just like the men. The medicine-man and the younger of the boys (an apprentice-sapuli) stayed, too. We puzzled our brains all day long, wondering exactly what was going on and convinced that things were not quite what they seemed.

Contrary to their usual custom, the men had gone off with every arrow they could lay their hands on, while the fact that the women and the medicine-man had stayed behind with us was very odd. At the same time, this was in itself reassuring, because with Indians a woman is something too valuable to be abandoned. We therefore waited quite calmly for our people to come back, hoping that the 'big mountain' that had to be crossed was the focal point of the watershed between the Matahuri-Yevarehuri basin and that of the Parime proper (the sources of this river are up near those of the Orinoco).

While we were resting in our hammocks, early in the afternoon, we heard a noise from some way off. It was our men running along the track, which followed the bank of the stream just here. The three brothers came first. They had their bows in their hands, but were out of arrows, and as they ran they kept jumping about, with gestures of fighting some enemy. The sapuli ran up to them, uttering deep howls that sounded like the plopping of heavy stones into a pool. The brothers pointed towards the highlands, plucking at their bow-strings in imitation of a battle, or something mighty like it.

For a moment our whole world seemed to crumble silently, engulfing us in its ruins. Now someone else came along the track from the forest, but the Indians were so excited about the tale they had to tell that they scarcely noticed him. It was one of the husbands. The boy was with him, and they also had no arrows left. The two of them joined the general discussion, and the women, too. It was quite obvious now that a battle had taken place somewhere in the hills. The men's pantomime, and the fact that they had no arrows left, made it only too plain. But at least they were safe and sound. There was one ugly possibility left, though: what had happened to our baggage?

We shouted to the brothers to ask them. They dismissed the matter with a rapid shake of their heads, making it clear that they knew nothing about it, or else that they just wanted us to keep quiet. When they had calmed down and were talking a little less wildly, we gathered (or so we thought) that the baggage had been safely stowed away under some palm fronds, a long way off the beaten track, just as it always was when they left it at the end of the stage. Not that this explanation satisfied us: it meant that whatever had happened, the baggage had been left there, and if there were any Samatari or Guayca moving about in the area, as the Indians said there were, they would end up by finding all our goods and pillaging them. Every now and again one of the brothers came up to us and touched the gun, with signs of approval that made their meaning quite clear.

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So we passed one of those anxious forest nights, our thoughts torn between the fate of our equipment and fear of an attack. But there were two aspects of the matter which reassured us, and bearing them in mind we managed to get some sleep towards morning. One was the comparative serenity of our Indians, who had made no alteration in their habitual way of spending the night—long spells of sleep, interrupted occasionally for a brief moment to attend to the fire. The other was the mental inventory we made of the items of equipment we still had with us, enough, certainly, for us to live on until we could get out of this region on to some Brazilian or Venezuelan river. One doubt still lingered: suppose the Indians refused to go on with us? They had been badly scared by whatever it was that had happened up on the hills, and rather than face it again they might want to change the route.

We set off next morning without any breakfast. But the fact that the Indians came along too, without making any bones about it, was very comforting. We went over two hills, and then the track crossed a stream of milky water running in a south-easterly direction. Its rocky bed was strewn with great jagged blocks of quartz. A little while later, on steadily rising ground, we turned aside into territory where there was no track at all, and reached a forest clearing which had been formed by the fall of a group of trees of the *cesalpinae* family. They were lying on the mouldering forest floor. And there, under a regular stockade of tree-trunks, was our baggage that the men had left on yesterday's trip. Our porters took some of the most-needed medical supplies and the best of the tinned stuff from this dump, to add to the burdens they were already carrying, and we went on towards the heart of the mystery.

The slope became gradually steeper and we finished up against a rocky sandstone cliff—a blank wall that we should have to climb. We followed along the foot of it to the right for perhaps two hundred yards till we came to a landslip, overgrown with bamboos and bromeliads, which offered an open view over the valley. We climbed up and found ourselves on a high plateau, among vegetation of a different order—poorer, thinner stuff. This plateau soon began to tilt downwards towards the farther side, at a steadily increasing angle, till we came to a stream of black water which ran in the same direction as the last we had seen.

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As if performing some rite, the medicine-man took a bath here. There really was something extraordinary about this character. A purely voluntary

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bath like this—we had never seen him take one before—seemed to prove the [756] point.

Between the sandstone of the high plateau and the usual granite of this [515] region there was here an unexpected intermediary layer white with kaolin. [135] After another hour of hard going we once more found ourselves in the lush vegetation of the lowlands. To the left of the track at one point, in a cavity formed by the collapse of a big tree whose roots had been torn out of the earth, we found the light baggage carried here and stowed the day before. It was apparently unharmed, even if literally covered with a revolting army of termites. We had the packs taken out of the hole (with the greatest caution for fear of a hidden snake), piled them all up together and covered them with palm leaves—because now the Indians didn't seem to be in any hurry to cover more mileage that day, nor did they lift a finger to start putting up the usual shelter for the night.

The baggage was untouched: the possibility of seeing our expedition through to the end was therefore open to us once more. Such a satisfactory state of affairs filled us with enthusiasm, and we decided to sacrifice no less than four tins of corned beef. We shared it out among the porters. This extra meal put some heart into the Indians, and picking up their machetes again they beckoned us to follow them along the track once more, where it veered to the south, through the forest. We could make out from their gestures that we were close to the heart of the great mystery now, and so took plenty of ammunition with us in case we should need it. The gradient stiffened. The track [712] turned to the right, into a thick maze of wild banana and thorny iriarteae, and then through a little swamp where there were numerous prints of bare feet, to end up in front of a stockade of thorny palm, freshly piled up for some defensive purpose.

A sweet, heavy smell hung in the air—the typical smell of an Indian camp after it has been abandoned for a few days, which comes from rotting remains of meat and game, and decaying vegetable matter. The barrier of thorny palm was an insuperable obstacle for bare Indian feet. We followed it along to the right till we found a break, half hidden by a few tree-trunks, which led us inside the camp. At first sight it seemed no different from the usual Samatari pattern. Here and there—all over the place, in fact—were piles of ashes and vegetable refuse of all kinds. But this encampment had one particular feature which, although the conscious part of our minds missed it at first, made us feel

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strangely uneasy. At last we realized what it was: all the poles to which the hammocks had been slung had been torn up and thrown on the ground. In one far corner, where the site sloped more steeply downhill, a cloud of insects had gathered. The brothers exchanged a look and we all went over. Without realizing it, we had our guns ready.

Right up against the barrier of thorny palm there was a little cleared patch, and here, in line, face downwards, lay four bodies. They were horribly covered with ants and termites, and around them hung swarms of flies, insects and butterflies of every colour. We could see no wounds, except in the neck of one corpse (it seemed very fat for an Indian). This man's head might have been smashed in, but the insects made it impossible for us to see exactly what had happened to him.

Our Indians didn't seem greatly impressed by this sight. They just kept at a distance, away from the smell and the insects, which flew up from the bodies of the dead men and swarmed rapidly over our own. The brothers, when I put a question to them, replied briefly '*tai*'—'we know', and held up seven fingers. Seven, not four. So there were seven dead, but a search of the whole area of the abandoned camp produced no sign of any more bodies. In spite of all our efforts to discover the truth, we never did know what had really happened. There were seven dead, and four of them lay here, inside the camp. Our Indians knew about the affray, and may have taken part in it—though this point was never cleared up—or possibly they had heard the story from some survivors they had met with. In any case, they did not seem to be very worried about it, and behaved as though it did not directly concern them, or rather as though they themselves were in a position of complete security, owing to some powerful protection. With a secret fear gnawing at me, I muttered to Carmine that this powerful protection, this secure defence, might well be the guns: the guns, in our men's eyes, had never ceased to possess magical powers of annihilating the enemy.

In this one remote corner of its vastness, the forest had seen one of its intimate tragedies played out. We had seen the result, but the rest we should never know. And the result was the eternal loneliness of human things abandoned: the sweet strong smell of putrefaction: and four men, veiled in a swarm of insects, lying on their faces with the taste of the earth between their teeth.

A shock such as this can have an insidiously weakening effect on one's morale. To avoid this, it was best to do something straight away. Action is always an irresistible spur to optimism, in moments of crisis. I therefore wrapped myself in one of our waterproof sheets, to keep the insects off and went close to the corpses to examine their wounds. The fat one—it looked as if he had been dead longer than the others, since his body had already swelled up—had the nape of his neck split open, which meant that he had been killed by the classic Samatari *stangata*, while the others had arrow wounds in the belly and throat. The smallest, who was almost a pygmy, had had his face completely smashed in by what must have been tremendous blows.

The Indians had lit a very smoky fire and we piled up the corpses two by two, covering them with a big mound of iriartea and manaca leaves. We thought we could go now. We had 'done something'. But there was still one further detail: all our instincts demanded some expression of our feelings in the presence of this forest tragedy. Some human touch, some gesture that would set us apart from the savagery all round us: not only for ourselves, but for our own Indians too. We cut the tops off four little trees and fixed cross-bars to them to make four rough crosses. We got the brothers to stand in front of the funeral mound with their machetes at the present, and stood beside them with our guns. This ceremony, crude as it was, had a striking effect upon our men, and even we ourselves, who had arranged it, were not unmoved.

I got the camera ready, though the scene was particularly difficult to photograph because of the failing light—it was dusk already—and for the first time in the whole trip the Indians agreed to come into the picture without showing a trace of fear.

Night found us on the track on the way back to the place we had previously halted at. We could only find our way with the help of some burning brands taken from the bonfire. When we came to our dumped baggage we had a shock: we hadn't put up a roof for the night, and in our present mood no one felt like setting about the job now. The day's events had left our nerves in such a state that the slightest noise from a machete would have finished us. We wondered whether we ought to keep awake and set guards, in case there were still Samatari in the neighbourhood ready to attack. But it didn't take us long to come to a decision.

'Let's pretend we're going to live for ever,' I said ironically to Carmine.

There were no Samatari any more, no Guayca, no snakes, no insects, no tarantulas. We wrapped ourselves in our waterproof sheets, threw ourselves on top of the luggage, and waited for morning.

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VI

Four days later—four days of forced marches, with heavy loads for all of us, ourselves included—we reached the banks of a little river which would have been navigable only by poling a small canoe. Between here and the scene of the battle (which the Shirians had christened '*Uasutép*'—'war') we had completely abandoned our intended route. We had headed first south-west and then, according to the compass, for the last two days directly west. The hoped-for Parime-Orinoco crossing could never be made now. But the Uasutép incident had had its effect upon us as well as our Indians, who were only too anxious to get back home, and we had not argued the point.

We had scarcely put up our roof for the night before the three brothers asked to be paid off. On this matter we stood firm. We wanted all our baggage here, and if our Shirians wished to leave us, they must first put us in touch with another tribe willing to furnish guides. The medicine-man and his brother set off westwards, across the stream, in search of one. As we watched them going off into dense forest, armed only with their machetes, we wondered if this would be one more journey without a return.

But thanks to the women (Nini's widow proved to be the heroine of the expedition) all our baggage was brought up in two days, and the two-man party returned from the west with a smoked leg of deer and some fresh tobacco. This was a sure sign that they had found some inhabited area. They had met with some 'good Shirians' who would arrive next day to take us on to the Ocamo and the Matacuni (which according to signs from the three brothers lay directly east). Thus we were saved from having to take the short cut home, and the Guayca Expedition was assured of a certain future after all.

We were therefore now only too happy to pay off our Shirians and release them. They were still very uneasy over Uasutép. We doled out cloth, knives, machetes and strings of coral (a luxury prohibited to the Shirians) with a generous hand. One day the Soto were bound to see what we had given them, and we wanted to show that we had learned to appreciate very highly the 'thieving Guaharibos' and had remunerated them with the generosity they deserved.

One of the brothers, after he had neatly wrapped his things in a parcel of

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leaves, wanted one thing more: the nail, the nail that had been his perpetual bane! We had plenty with us, and gave him half a dozen.

We sat around big festive fires (though, alas, we had no fine beast to cook on them!) and the medicine-man exorcized their new possessions with his chants. That night we slept tighter than we had ever done since the time when we had drunk cacire on the Yevarehuri.

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VII

The next morning's dawn was silent as the tomb, and drowsily we sensed a strange difference. Then, all of a sudden, we woke to the realization that the Shirians were gone. Men, women, children and dogs had vanished into the depths of the night. The fires hadn't been made up for some time and were nearly all out. The hammocks were still swinging in their places—it was not unusual for them to be abandoned and it had happened before, because being simply lianas and tree-bark they were very easily replaced.

Carmine fired off a few shots. The forest swallowed them up without even an echo. Our enthusiasm had betrayed us once more. We should have postponed the pay-off until the arrival of the promised Shirians, and then our men would not have shot the moon. As it was, we could only wait in the hope that the others would turn up, though it might well be that the medicine-man and his brother had invented them so that they could satisfy us and be off. . . . Dear, damnable brigand brother, with the gentle, brooding look that was like the cloudy sweetness of fermenting wine, off and away through the forest, leading his little band back over the familiar path, back to the river on the other side of the mountain—laden with our goods, and proud owner of the nail! The greatest experience of his lifetime was over now, and he was hardly to be blamed for having gone off in the middle of the night, without saying good-bye. How could anyone guess what reasons prompted him—a rebel, an anarchist, a wild savage from the Amazon mountains, who in a moment of weakness had joined up with an expedition of flat-foots, men incapable of keeping alive without a mountain of tins!

There was nothing to be done about it, because the situation itself was without remedy. If the new Shirians really did come, the departure of the old ones might even prove to be an advantage. The baggage was all here with us,

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123 on the spot, and our losses had been reduced to a minimum. In fact, the only things the Indians had taken along with them on their nocturnal flight were the cooking pots, a pair of trousers that had been drying, and ten pounds of arsenic wrapped up in an old shirt. We had brought it to cure animal skins. There wasn't the slightest risk of any of the fugitives getting poisoned, because time and time again, with all the eloquence gestures and mimicry could command, we had told them about the terrible effects of this white powder.

We spent the first day playing Casino. I had had time by now to become a champion at this game: I almost invariably beat Carmine, the vaunted ex-ace. When I saw that things—particularly the lack of tobacco—were getting on my companion's nerves, I purposely played badly, so as to lose. This was at least some satisfaction for Carmine in these sad days.

At night we took it in turn to stay on guard, after building a rough defence-work of tree-trunks on the forest side—where its tentacles stretched out almost into our very hammocks; the river side we left open, to give us a clear field of vision. The left flank was bounded by the curving course of the stream, and on the right a little tributary came in—dry now, after the last few fine days. From this direction we heard the croaking of toads, loud enough to deafen us to any other noise. This right flank was our weak point. At intervals of an hour or even less we shot off a few rounds, which silenced the croakings for a while, until they started off again more stridently than ever, with the chirping of crickets too. It was New Year's Eve 1954.

The second day passed in absolute silence: we didn't talk, and there was no longer any wind in the trees, the weather having taken a turn for the worse. Even cards had palled by now. I jotted down a few notes in my log, which I hadn't touched since leaving Frenario's, and we took it in turns to try to sleep, without much success. The very precariousness of our situation made it pointless to hoard our food supplies and we treated ourselves to double and treble meals, combining meat, ham and rice-and-butter and drinking coffee, tea and milk by the bucketful.

The second night was more eventful than the first: over beyond that ditch full of toads something certainly seemed to be happening. We didn't doubt but that an ambush, or something of the sort, was being prepared for us. Or was it just a tapir after all? We didn't spare the cartridges. Some of them had got wet and we weren't very confident of hitting whatever target it was that we were aiming at. We must have fired a hundred shots too into the toads.

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But between one bullet and the next, and between one possibly human footfall and the next, the creatures made as much noise as machine-guns—just at those very moments when we were sure someone was creeping up to the camp. Neither of us slept that night. Dawn on the river found us shuddering with nervous exhaustion.

The Indians still didn't arrive. To fill in the time, we prepared a plan of action down to every minute detail. Next day, if there was still no sign of anybody, we would shift our baggage across the river and hide it somehow or other a good way off. Then, with a hammock and provisions for three or four days, we would start off towards the westward, trying to find the track the medicine-man had used. There must be someone living somewhere over there. The deer's leg and the tobacco were proof of it. When we found these Indians we would persuade them, by hook or by crook, to help us get *somewhere.*

What if we found nobody? Then we would fall back on our alternative programme: though even to consider it at all made our hair stand on end. We would build a raft (I'd already had a little experience in such matters) and go down the river till we were well away from this region. Rapids and falls would be serious obstacles, since a raft can't easily be hauled over rocks. But there was no other way.

VIII

If I had to describe the Indian who suddenly confronted us on the evening of the third day—he was coming downstream and we saw him at the bend—I could only use the word 'pale'.

He was young and handsome, stark naked except for a tuft of white feathers tied round his arm, and very pale. He stopped at the bend to look round. He seemed at first to be alone, but behind him there were others. We had our guns pointed at the visitor, because we had jumped to the conclusion that we were being attacked. Then we saw that the man was unarmed. This left us in no doubt. His intentions were peaceful. He stayed where he was, watching us, probably scared of our weapons: and who knows by what obscure mental processes, by what association of ideas, I found a name for him?

'Come along, Dolfus,' I called.

* 123 This fantastic appellation sounded quite harmonious in the forest, even to Indian ears, and brought Dolfuss' followers out of their concealment, splashing through the water towards us.

[131] [101] Dolfuss belonged to the Shirians of the Uaka tribe. These are scattered over the territory bounded by the Matacuni, the Padamo and the tributary streams of the Upper Ventuari. They are similar in appearance to the Pulipuli people, though rather more savage. They were very timid, and full of references to the Guayca, who they said were very active in this area, particularly in the parts we had just come from.

With Dolfuss there was an old man who was always either squatting down or else propping himself up on one leg; and two dour, surly-looking boys, who kept well away from our guns with a gleam of terror in their eyes. The next morning brought a whole host, along with women and children too, and of course we had to let them all examine our beards and rub themselves against them, and investigate other more detailed peculiarities of our anatomy. By urging the whole crowd of them on with sweeping gestures, we managed to get on our way very quickly, and a few hours later arrived on the banks of the Ocamo, a smallish river but strangely resembling the Upper Merevari. From the last high point we had been able to make out some huge flat-topped massifs, blue in the haze of distance, which must certainly have belonged to the Duida-Marahuaca group. For a moment, we hoped to come out on a patch of savannah land where we should be able to dry the damp forest mould out of ourselves and our belongings. But the Shirians told us there was no savannah in these parts.

[361] [501] [342] [162] [165] The Uaka huts were on the side of a hill, a hundred yards from the right bank of the river, which we crossed by means of a length of rotten wood, shaped like a canoe. There were three buildings, each with the single-span sloping roof, very humble affairs, so low-pitched that inside them one risked getting a beam in one's eye at any moment. There were about fifty of these people, and among them we noticed many who had reached a considerable age, which is unusual. There must have been some aspect of the Ocamo region which favoured longevity in the inhabitants. There was an 'ape-man' too—an old, solitary fellow, almost dumb, who came up to us with gurgles of amazement, not daring to touch us. However, he took one of the axes when we gave it to him and with the aid of some of the youngsters started making us a cabin.

Life with the Shirians was made extremely difficult by their petulant ways

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and by their squalor—which we just had to accept. However, better that than 123*
our last two lonely nights over again, and our two days' rest here did us good.

Plans for continuing our journey did not go as smoothly as we should have wished. Not one of the Uaca was inclined to go down the Ocamo with us. It seemed there were a lot of Guayca Indians along the river, and that there weren't sufficient canoes. Apart from the old log which had enabled us to cross the river, there was only one little craft, and this had a gaping hole in the bows, stopped up with a great lump of clay to make it watertight. The only way open to us otherwise lay westwards towards the Matacuni: the Uaka declared that we could get there with only one *manashi* (overnight stop). We should have to climb a mountain, but it was not high and there was a pass. On the Matacuni there were other Uaka, and then, higher up—if we understood them correctly—there were some Ukumatari, savage and suspicious, but not bad men. It didn't take us long to come to a decision, and we started out for the Matacuni.

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The first day's march brought us, in the evening, to a col between two great round humps of granite, from which we could make out, to the west, the vertical wall of the Duida mountains. We looked longingly in their direction, knowing that at their foot lay the savannah land of Esmeralda and the great Orinoco.

But the Matacuni Uaka seemed equally reluctant to take us down their river as far as the Orinoco, and they too gave as a reason the eternal fear of the Guayca. To go any further westwards, relying on the problematical tracks, seemed too difficult a project, and one that held out little hope of success. True, we might reach the Padamo, but if no-one was willing to take us down that river either, where were we to make for then? We couldn't keep trekking over the whole of the *Territorio Amazonas* (the southern tip of Venezuela) from river to river until we got to the Orinoco. There was only one thing to do, however paradoxical it sounded: follow the Matacuni right up to its source. The Uaka were prepared, for a suitable fee, to escort us there, doing the trip in ten days. We could then cross the mountains, which seemed to be inhabited by other Uaka, and descend one or other of the tributaries of the Ventuari watershed. This route bristled with difficulties: from the Matacuni rapids to the problems we should have to face on the northern cordilleras, but these caused the Uaka no sinking of the heart and they were ready to tackle them. They told us too that when we reached the highlands by this route we should run into the Makiritari tracks leading from the Ventuari-Erbato-Merevari territory to the

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Marahuaca mountains. These tracks were known to the Indians as the '*Marahuaca pilisho*' that is, roads of the blow-pipe mountains, regularly traversed by the Makiritari when they needed supplies of cane, the precious raw material for making their weapons.

We knew from experience that the Indians always magnify the difficulties and dangers of any journey, and we quite expected that our trip would be like walking round the garden. We decided upon it therefore with light hearts, putting our trust once more in our guardian angel.

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[For information on the capture and subsequent treatment of the author and his party by a nomadic group of the Yanoama, called by the author "Samatari," see category 123, pp. 92-140.]

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[For information on the author's personal experiences in the field and his relationship with the various Yanoama Indian groups with whom he came in contact, see category 116, pp. 25-26, 41-45, 52-54, 58-66, 71-81, 84-116, 119-120, 123-152, 185-189 and 197-220.]